SIGNET

Literary Magazine

2020

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LETTER FROM *THE EDITORS*

Hello Everyone,

I sure am happy you decided to pick up this particular edition of Signet. A lot of sweat and tears went into making this magazine happen...especially with our rush to move off campus. I am incredibly grateful that we were able to make this literary magazine happen every year. It takes a lot of work and dedication from everyone; not just the Signet Staff, but also everyone who submits!

Thank you so much for submitting your amazing work and I do apologize we can't include every voice in this magazine, but we do our best to try! Everyone is so incredibly talented in something whether you believe me or not. So thank you again for submitting, and thank you to the Signet staff for working hard choosing what to include and doing their fair share of editing. I also wanted to thank Elisabeth, Professor Renfroe, and Kendra for their constant support and help. Without all of these things this magazine would not be here today.

I personally put a lot into this particular edition fo Signet so I truly hope you like it! I hope everyone keeps submitting and keeps writing and keep creating! It is so incredibly important because those are the things that live beyond us and it is our responsibility to leave our mark somehow and someway. Have fun reading this edition!

Keep being kind,

Ben Ruiz

LETTER FROM *THE EDITORS*

My Dear Queens Community,

It has been a joy and absolute pleasure to serve on the Signet Literary Magazine staff for the past three years. I have made so many friendships and memories that I will cherish for the rest of my life. Every year, I am amazed at the abundance of sheer talent and quality of work that falls into our submission box. We have such a hard time picking pieces! You are all a true representation of what it means to be a Royal. Thank you for continuing to support us! You have been incredibly encouraging and kind. YOU, the readers, are the reason we can do what we do. We love being able to give you this little sliver of our beloved community!

To Professor Renfroe, you have been an endless supporter and incredible guidance through every situation. We have faced so much and learned so much all at once, and we have you to thank for getting us to where we are today. To Ben, my partner in crime, my other half editor, thank you for the laughs, your friendship, and your mutual love of this magazine. I wouldn't have wanted to share this position with anyone else! To Kendra, thank you for your support, friendship, and always running to our aid whenever we need help. We have been so lucky to have you. To the Signet staff, you have worked immensely hard this year, and despite all that has happened, we have produced an amazing magazine that I hope you can be proud of. You have each played a significant role in its production and I am thankful for the time and energy you put into this work of art.

I cannot wait to see how Signet continues on into the future. I'm so grateful I that I got to be a part of such a wonderful family. I hope you all enjoy the 2020 edition of Signet Literary Magazine just as much as we did in putting it together!

Happy Reading, friends!

Elisabeth King

LETTER FROM *THE EDITORS*

To the Queens Community,

Thank you so much for picking up this year's edition of Signet. A lot of hard work and dedication is poured into this magazine, and I hope you enjoy looking through all of the pieces as I have over this semester. Thank you to everyone who submitted their brilliant work this year. We truly could not make this magazine without you!

I want to specially thank Professor Renfroe for all of his support and guidance throughout the production of Signet. Elisabeth, thank you for being such an incredible friend and leader, and for letting me bounce all of my ideas off of you. Your guidance is unparalleled. Ben, thank you for spearheading InDesign and making this magazine a reality. Your dedication and vision for Signet really makes this year's magazine stand out.

I hope you all enjoy the 2020 edition of Signet and continue to support us by submitting your writing and art and reading our magazine. Signet is made through a 100% student effort, and we could not be prouder of that.

Kendra Post

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Asbury

Mabry Busby

I rounded the corner, and
my grip tightened on the
chipped, leather steering
wheel.

The road felt just as endless
just as dark and twisted
as the night that made me
hate it.

A car neared me; it was
hard to tell if it was him. It
sped past, lit only by the
moon.

I'd been so many times, but I
still hoped the GPS would take me on
some other route, some other road.
No.

I passed his mailbox.
His long, winding driveway.
I tried, I promise, but
that's all it took.

It took nothing for him
to take everything from me.

Suddenly, I was in his bed again,
pretending to be asleep.
He knew, he knew, and he
still took everything.

I pulled over to the side
of the road, trying not
to be sick.
I just wanted to get away.

I looked back at the
mailbox, glinting gold in
the moonlight.
I wished it was over.

This pain—it isn't poetry.

I used to love the moon.
Now I just wish it was morning.

Ebony Deep

Thelathia Singleton

You know my every need way down deep in parts unknown to many
My black thoughts are scrupulous, good and plenty
Making you feel me like a good dime bag giggling silly
My aroma make you love dizzy
Committing, love tired bodies woven together like dreadlocks
My sweet ebony canyon will knock your socks off
We meant to be
Like ink on paper
Verses flowing easy and free
You my sweet lick daddy
Specially made just for me
Like a stop traffic booty sitting pretty
No complaints made from your love-soaked lips
I make you blush when I mention my hips
Loving inside and out one another
Loving to our full potential
Loving you until breathing is steady
And all is still
Until our hearts less heavy
Until no longer need of a refill

Stealing Wishes

Celeste Baker

There was a certain thrill
to breaking the calm
of the well water with you watching.
Breaking unspoken rules.
I dipped my hand into the body of coins
and caught a shiny wish for my own.
It's not right, stealing someone's wish
you complained as I shoved the money
in my pocket. It clanked against
several other wishes, dreams, hopes from days past.
Maybe one of them was yours.
No one will be any wiser for it, I said. Besides,
sometimes a person cannot afford their own.

Untitled
Sean Teager

I am a troubled soul, adrift and lost
Here I lay begging for guidance
As a sinner who has never known the divine.
I know no saints,
-but by your name

I do not seek for anything beyond earth,
My soul does not need to be weighed.
For I have found a truth far more profane.
I know no salvation,
-but in your arms

I have sinned, and will remain thus.
I've tasted the sweetest fruit,
Carrying of the most lascivious sounds.
I know no euphoria,
-but by your lips

I have felt judgment, and it is not divine,
It is a lusty maiden who cares so deeply
And she knows of me so truly.
I know no Heaven,
-but in your eyes

Knowing thus I have offered my very self,
And felt your healing touch upon me.
In your presence I feel no fear.
I know no release,
-but in your hands

And so you are my faith, my religion.
I pray so deeply at the altar to your heart
I taste the intoxicating wine from your lips
I feel the unholy spirit dwelling in your eyes
I take repentance in the sinking of your teeth into my flesh
I delight so deeply in your tempestuous sermons
And there is no sin so wonderful, as one in your arms
You are my faith, my religion
I know no Goddess,
-but in you

Burned Hands

Sabrina Ingram

She had turned on the oven after preparing the pancake mix, the hum of the low music being heard around her lonely apartment when she heard the loud doorbell. She grew confused, her eyebrows knitting together as she wondered who it could be. She moved towards the door, opening it wide as she had expected a close friend and the audible gasp that escaped her lips wasthe indication that it was not her close friend. Before her was somebody that she had not seen ina long time and had never expected to see again.

"Hello Darling," He greeted sheepishly as she made no move to say anything as she simply stared. Her eyes were wide but were still the very same despite the wrinkles that had formed and wondered if the frown lines were because of him, the grey hair that he sported had tastefully appeared over the years as he felt the nervousness of her reaction. She didn't say anything as she turned away, leaving the door open which signalled that he could come in as he sat down on the couch that he didn't recognize. He awaited for the familiar purring of the cat that they had once shared but there appeared to be no sign of her anywhere.

She paced the room while muttering to herself as he sat on the couch looking at her helplessly. "Darling," he called out for what seemed like the millionth time. She looked at him, her lips pulled into a tight line, jaw clenched, but it was her eyes that drew him into a halt. Her icy blue eyes, once kind and loving, were hardened with this hidden fire. His mouth closed and once it was clear that he had given up any attempt of his fruitless crusade, she resumed her pacing.

"I just, I- I always thought," she kept muttering under her

breath where he couldn't hear her.

"I love you," He once again attempted which caused her movements to freeze as her entire body tensed upon his revelation. However, instead of her withering stare, she felt her nose begin to itch in a warning that she may begin to cry. She felt tears well up as she tried to blink them away. He recognized how her tense body relaxed, how her fist clenched in what he knew was her trying not to cry. He couldn't see her face to know if the tears had spilled but he tookthis moment of weakness to continue. "I've always loved you. You know that, baby." She felt alaugh bubble up and she was thankful because her body's attempt to break into sobs suddenly disappeared. She didn't bother to cover it as the laugh, a smile extending across her face.

"Darling, don't do that. You know it's true," His words reached her as she recognized it was no longer acceptable to pace and avoid the inevitable conversation, leading her to tentatively move towards the couch and sit down as far away as she could. She briefly remembered buying the couch and how she had craved for his input but quickly pushed the fleeting memory away as she turned her body in order to examine him. She admired his clear grey eyes, and marvelled for a moment that they still looked exactly the same despite all these years. His skin had been tanned, his muscles were toned and now littered with tattoos. His hair was short and now speckled with grey hair much like hers and was an instant reminder of the years they had lost.

"Do you still love me? That's all I need to know," She noticed that there was something about the way that he said it that sounded nervous, a hint of hesitation as her answer clearly scared him.

She looked away, examining her hands that had wrinkled over time, her fingers were slimmer and no longer resembled a young girl's but rather a woman's. The change was something she had kept up with, recognizing that the wrinkles and old burns from her attempts at learning how to cook. "You'll never have to learn how to cook as I never want you to have to raise a finger and I'd like to not die from food poisoning," came back to the surface of her mind, a moment that reminded her of their wedding.

"I loved you on the day you promised me I'd never have to lift another finger. I began hating you when I yanked my finger away from the oven after attempting to remove chicken nuggets from the oven one day. And a little bit more after that when I sliced my hand trying to cut a tomato. I screamed obscenities toward your name and vowed that I would hate you forever. And I do. I hate you so much," she began. Her voice sounded broken as tears welled into her eyes and she felt the emotions from her memories come back to her. He took the chance to reach over and place his hand on her knee, squeezing it in an attempt to remind her that he was therefor her but after feeling her body tense, he remembered that it had been years since they had last touched.

After she managed to gather herself once more, she grabbed his hand and gently placed it on the couch in between them. "I hate you," She repeated softly. "I hate that you left me, thatyou broke your promises. I hated that you weren't here on our anniversaries or on Valentine's Day. I hated that I couldn't kiss you and that it had to be my hand in between my legs," She laughed, though the humor didn't quite reach him. "But more importantly, I hate that everytime I tried to move on, I couldn't because all I wanted was you. I hated that when I heard of new sushi restaurants opening, I wanted to try them with you. That I still haven't been to that Korean Barbecue place because I know how much you would want to go. Because despite how much I hate you and I really do." Tears were spilling as she no longer tried to stop them, "I love you so much. Despite the fact that you left, all I ever wanted was you. Because in my vows, I told youthat I would never stop loving you and unlike you, I meant mine."

He practically flinched at the dig but he recognized she craved comfort and cautiously moved to sit beside her. When he saw no resistance through her sobbing, he moved to pull her into a hug which she responded by pounding his chest with her fists but not fully removing herself from his grasp. Her flushed face, red eyes, and runny nose were all he could see as he tried to wipe away the tears but the screaming was all he heard.

"How dare you!" She shouted. "You made me love you and promised you would never leave. But you did. And I had to watch you do it alone. You left me alone!" She screamed through her tears as she continued to pound into his chest and he never stopped her, and simply took the punishment of breaking her heart.

"I never wanted to leave you," He whispered into her ear when he noticed that the pounding began to slow, and part of him was sure that he only said it because he deserved more pain and hoped that she would resume the punches. But she didn't want to listen to his excuses, and instead laid her head in the crook of his neck, embracing the unfamiliar scent of sweat and something unrecognizable, not caring that this was not the same that she had loved so many years ago.

It was a moment of them embracing each other, trying to remember the old times while also realizing that everything had changed. She bit back the question that she never got to ask before while he hoped this wouldn't be the last moment they shared. But finally, he groaned as he whispered, "I have to explain," and she nodded, not quite feeling anything as she stilled herself for the long awaited explanation.

They pulled away from each other as he took her hand and smiled softly when she didn't flinch. "We were low on money, you remember?" She nodded. "You had been talking about getting a job so that we would have enough to potentially raise a child but I didn't want to break my vows. I knew I would be getting a promotion at work at any moment, and it paid well. I knew that as long as we made it to that point, we would be fine." She nodded along to everything he was saying, remembering how desperate he was getting.

"It was Franco's idea. And I didn't think it was a bad one," The pointed look in her eyes was a warning to move on so he did. "It was our rival's store and we knew that they didn't have any cameras and one of his friends, Lucas, had a job there and could get us in at night. So we did. They kept the password to their computer on a sticky note under the keypad which immediately gave us access to the register. And we took everything in there.

It was only a few hundred dollars. But it would help us with the bills for the month and Franco only wanted to help me." The explanation seemed so simple and so easy that she didn't want to believe it.

"Then how did you get caught?"

"Turns out Franco didn't want to just help me. He wanted the same job as me and thought this would be a perfect way of making sure I was gone. It seemed a little extreme to me, but he was desperate. He was in worse shape than I was." He shook his head, "It was all a setup and not even 24 hours later, I was arrested."

"Why are you out now?" She was angry, beyond angry that the once love of her life had been so stupid to trust a man that he barely knew. Her eyes were filled with fire once more and she felt like she could rip something to shreds but she wanted to know everything and knew she had to listen.

"Good behavior. It was my first time getting in trouble and I'm only getting out a few years early," He explained softly, sensing the anger coming off of his wife but not sure how to deflate it.

"And you came back to me?" She asked curiously, the surprise in her tone was evident and he was almost appalled by that reaction. "Well I certainly was not going to fall in love with Bruce," He joked which caused her to hit his arm.

"Stop the abuse!" He shouted dramatically, glad to see that she was still the same woman he had fallen in love with.

"You deserve it, you pig," She snapped in response, rolling her eyes but the smile threatening to break out let him know that she wasn't truly angry with him anymore.

"So, will you still have me?" He asked after a moment, his eyes widened in fear as he braced himself for an answer as she sighed.

"I hate you," She mumbled quietly before pulling him into a kiss. To both of them, it was a moment of coming back together and he knew then that those words had an entirely new meaning between them as he tasted her salty tears and she melted into the lips that had not changed one bit. "I hate you so much that your punishment is that you can never leave my side again. Which means, no more getting arrested. Got it, Jailbird?"

"Whatever you say, ma'am," he laughed for a moment before pulling her into a kiss.

Apple Season

Lara Boyle

"So, what made you leave?"

It was a question that had taken me months to figure out, and the answers still varied: *I was bored. I wanted something new. We were together for far too long.* This was bound to happen eventually. My parents didn't agree with the decision, under the fair assumption that I was in over my head, (Of course, they were right, I just didn't want to them think so) but, even they knew they couldn't stop me. I was an adult, however new at being one, and I would have to learn the hard way. I looked up at the stranger, a middle-aged man whose eyes said I've been there, and told him the truth.

"I don't know. I guess I needed a change."

The words felt like betrayal After five years of a loyal, committed relationship, I decided to leave everything behind and start fresh. I relied too much on the familiar because it was comfortable, but I wasn't happy. The more I thought about things, the more I started to wonder why I stayed. I felt trapped. If I didn't leave now, I never would.

"I did the same awhile back," he nodded in understanding. It was a Sunday afternoon in October - Apple Season, and everyone was trying to get the nicest pick. People waited months for this moment, with some even turning the occasion into a family affair, and the isles quickly fell to chaos. There was the sound of a mother with a stubborn child, saying *Jimmy, come back here!* Or *don't touch that, you don't need it!* followed by unsolicited, wishful crying, *How do I know if I don't have one, Mom?*

"Trust me, you won't regret it. Best decision I've ever made."

I hoped so, too. After growing up in the world Steve Jobs created, the choice to convert to Samsung was something of a heresy. I might as well have announced that I was pregnant at the Passover Seder, or that I had decided to skip college and flip burgers, based on the reactions I received when I told my family I would not be getting the iPhone X, but the Samsung Galaxy Note 8. Up until this moment, half of my life-span could be measured in iOS updates. I remembered my Bat-Mitzvah year not because I became a woman, but because I received my first Apple device. Entire memories which, in another time, might have been lost to history, could easily be found in the iCloud. The transition from my childhood to adolescence would forever be signified with a rectangular white box that read Designed in California, and a universe unlocked by the touch of a home button.

Was there really any good reason to abandon it all now?

I suppose this story could be a testament to the privilege of first world problems -the kind talking heads on the news love to blame on millennials, yet as I scanned the beaming white pillars of the temple that was the AT&AT store, the only numbers which had any effect on the current majority were the price tags. I kept my eyes away from the glistening, heavenly display of the latest iPhone model, glanced once more at customers while they marveled at the golden glory of the effortless screen, and tentatively crossed over to the other side. Is this how Eve felt, I wondered briefly, when she took a bite of the forbidden fruit? Did she disobey because she truly wanted to, or because she was compelled to act of her own volition after being told no? Before I had the chance to contemplate any further, a black box was placed in my hands, and the permanence of my choice came to pass. I had pictured this moment ever since the announcement of the device, and, despite the hours spent of online research - watching videos, browsing user feedback, engaging on the official website, I half expected to wake up with only a fleeting vision of today and return back at home, in my bed, ready to start the morning by unplugging my iPhone 8 plus from the charger, the

encounter already forgotten.

Instead, I embraced it, completely intrigued by the sleek build and contrast of design. The light was a little darker on this side of the store, and the general popularity, like the phone itself, was slim, but I didn't mind. The foreignness of change was both enticing and transient all at once. Nobody would tell me then, as I caressed the beautiful Samsung Note 8, that the Galaxy Pen I had waited anxiously for would prove to be more of a nuisance than a benefit. I wouldn't find out until much later, when being unintentionally excluded from the wonders of an iMessage group chat, that live messages would quickly lose their initial marvel. Overtime, the mirage began to fade. The Android System, like the Wizard of Oz, expertly disguised setbacks in promises it couldn't keep.

Or maybe I was just too brainwashed to see beyond the lens Apple had instilled upon me since a young age. Whatever the case, I found myself returning a year later, on October 31st, to give up the costume of my recently developed, grossly overstated passion for Samsung in favor of what I'd deeply missed. Apple, despite what the critics will say, was an old friend - it didn't matter how long you'd been gone, or why, or where you'd been...So long as you came back, in the end, it was as if you'd never left.

Televised

Sabrina Ingram

I always lost myself in your blue eyes,
the kind that looked like they came from the skies.
It was like I was special, like a prize.
It was while you were between my thighs
that I knew our love was on it's demise.
It was while we were eating popeyes
that I felt we were no longer allies.
On the night we tried to catch fireflies,
I knew you were trying to minimize
in your head that our love had vaporized.
I didn't know you had rationalized
your decision to decriminalize
your desire to kill and cannibalize.
So when you took me to bed, I didn't think twice.
When you took the handcuffs and immobolized.
You had growled and seemed dehumanized.
I hadn't begun to antagonize
you until you tried to hospitalize.
At least my dream to be immortalized
had come true when media publicized
death and my picture was televised.

Elegy for My Promise

Nia Murat

I broke it. That contract you and I signed
with intertwined fingers –

our middle school love affair.
I remember our first kiss, prompted by

heaven and sevens – a clash of teeth that grew
into *I love you*. I broke that.

I heard its agonized wail – it was bent
with splinters of bone piercing through

and spilling marrow as it bled out.
I held someone else as it died,

my hands the bloodied ones
as our promise hemorrhaged

into me
and you.

Burn Our Brains

Hana Newnam

The light flickers on and off in the darkness around us.
The cold metal bench we are seated on
sears through our clothes as we laugh softly,
disguised by the nighttime's shadow.
A whisper comes from your direction,
but I only feelt he tickle of your words
as they brush my cheeks with a kiss.
I like this, I murmur to you,
brain ignited with the fog that we inhaled.
Our bodies sigh into each other, melting together.
My lips meet yours and I taste the bitterness of smoke.
You try to deepen the kiss,
but I fall over, instead,
giggling almost loud enough to get us caught.
I pull you on top of me into a warm embrace
as we burn our brains as well as the night.

The Woman of the Woods

Cameron Turnbull

Posted September 22nd, 2019

I'm not sure if this is the right place to post something like this, but I've been told I should share this story. It's pretty bizarre, but I promise you that it's true. If anybody else has had similar experiences, please let me know.

I guess this all started about ten years ago when I was eight. I live (lived, still not used to having moved out yet) in a sparsely populated, newly developed neighborhood in upstate New York. The road wound far back into the woods and through valleys until it stopped at our house. My parents really liked the privacy of the place, and I did too at first. I had a huge backyard to play in with tons of places to build little forts or climb trees. I spent so much time out there that to this day I can reconstruct the entire forest behind my house from memory. After a while though, I began to regret the solidarity of my house. There were no other neighborhood kids to play with. I tried playing outside with my parents, but it just wasn't the same. One day though, when I was out in the woods trying to build a bow and arrow with a nicely shaped branch that I found, I saw another kid.

He looked to be about my age, with scruffy brown hair and plump cheeks, but he was dressed really strange, like he was from the eighteen hundreds or something. He was crouched down playing in the dirt when I saw him.

"Hey," I said.

He stood and looked back at me, and I realized something was off about him. His eyes were entirely black, like his pupils had taken over. They were deep and reflective too, like looking into a mirror.

"Whoa," I said when I saw his eyes. "Your eyes are weird!"

"Really?" he asked. "I think yours look weird."

I didn't like hearing him say that. I tilted my head to one side and looked at him inquisitively.

"Are you magic?"

He shook his head. "I don't think so. Are you?"

"No," I replied. "I'm just a human."

Now he looked at me funny. "A human?"

"Yeah," I said. "My teacher says we're like monkeys, but smarter."

"I'm smart," the boy said. "Maybe I'm also human, just a different kind of human."

"Maybe," I said. "I've never seen another human with black eyes though."

"All my friends have black eyes," the boy said.

I got excited. More kids in the neighborhood?

"Where are your friends?" I asked. "I want to meet them!"He pointed further into the trees. "We all live in the forest with Mama."

"Oh so they're your brothers and sisters?"

The boy hesitated, thinking about something, then nodded.

"Can I meet them?" I asked.

The boy shook his head. "Not right now. They're all pretty shy and Mama doesn't like strangers."

"Aw man," I said.

"Don't worry about it!" The boy said. "I'll come here and play with you. When we're not strangers anymore I can take you to my family!"

"Okay," I said. I extended my hand, hoping to make us less of strangers. "I'm Cameron."

The boy shook my hand. "I'm Henry."

Henry and I spent a lot of time together that summer. He was nice, albeit a little boring. I was really looking forward to meeting his brothers and sisters though. The more friends I had to play with, the better.

I have to go now, I'm writing this while I'm at work and my break is over. I'll post more later tonight or tomorrow.

Posted September 24th, 2019

I'm back. Sorry it's been longer than I said. A number of people sent me articles about black-eyed children, and I went down a rabbit hole and forgot to continue my story, hell I got so into it that I forgot to study for my midterm exam too. I'm still hoping for some other personal stories, so if you guys have experienced a similar thing or know somebody who has, please share.

Anyway, Henry and I continued hanging out. We always played outside though, never at my house even though I had been telling him about my *Super Smash Bro's* game. I had invited him to play several times but he would always give me the same answer.

"I don't want your mom or dad to see me," he would say. "I'm afraid they will make fun of my eyes."

It made me upset for Henry to suggest that my parents would be mean to him. I had known my parents my whole life and they were always nice to me. I stopped seeing Henry for a couple days, but eventually I forgave him and we continued playing. I couldn't stay mad at my only friend and besides, I guessed it was really my fault that Henry felt self-conscious about his eyes. It was the first thing I pointed out when I met him. I apologized to him, and he seemed to take it kindly, but he still wanted to stay away from my house and my parents. I guessed he was just more shy than most kids.

At some point, I had read about the Amish, and I began to wonder if Henry was Amish. The book said that they didn't use technology, wore old-style clothing, and lived in their own towns, and Henry seemed to match that description. Maybe that's why he didn't want to play *Super Smash Bros*, he'd never heard of video games.

"Are you Amish?" I asked him one day while we were building a fort.

"What's an Amish?" he replied. "Someone who lives in their own town and doesn't play video games," I answered, trying to sound smart.

"Oh. I don't know. I guess I could be."

"That sucks," I said. "Video games are awesome."

"Mama says that the forest provides all we need."

That phrase sounded familiar to me. I thought back to the Discovery Channel.

"Are you a native American?" I asked.

Henry looked confused again.

"Never mind," I said.

I want to take a break now and share what I read about black-eyed children. If you didn't see what people commented on my last post, go check it out and do some googling if you want a good scare. Apparently, most urban legends revolving around black-eyed children involve people being stalked by them at night. A couple stories even talk about how the black-eyed children would take people away, never to be heard from again. These stories are all frightening, but it's nothing like what I experienced. Maybe you think I'm misremembering my childhood correctly, but I know Henry had black eyes. I wouldn't forget such an unusual detail. Henry may have been odd, but he never tried to harm me. His mother though...

I'm getting ahead of myself. I'm gonna go to bed and I'll continue this tomorrow.

Posted September 25th, 2019

All these stories of black-eyed children are getting in my head. Last night I had a nightmare about Henry even though I never found him to be scary. It was just he and I, back at my old house, except my house was all broken down and deserted. Henry was crawling around on all fours like some kind of animal. He scurried in and out of the shadows, avoiding the moonlight flowing in through the windows and holes in the ceiling, but I could always see those black, unblinking eyes. Even in the darkness, his eyes were darker than dark. It's hard to explain.

Seriously, fuck you, whoever told me about that urban legend. I hardly slept.

Anyway. I mentioned in my last post that I did in fact meet Henry's family, and many of you want to know more, particularly about Henry's "Mama."

One day, Henry and I met in the woods like we always did, but this time he invited me to see his family. I was thrilled to

finally meet some new kids, and Henry and I set off into the forest.

We must've walked for about an hour. Seriously, this was more of a hike than a walk, especially with the uneven terrain. Had I known just how far away he lived, I would've brought a backpack with snacks. It was a beautiful trek though. The sunlight, which usually pressed down on us with a lot of heat, was suppressed by the thick canopy overhead. Light trickled down like rain, peppering the forest floor and revealing mossy rocks and verdant plants. We crossed over a creek too, and I figured that I should probably come back here at some point if only for the creek. I could fish, splash around, maybe even try building a dam. There really was so much more to this forest than I thought.

We eventually reached a point deep in the woods where we stopped. There was no sound here, no birds, no wind, I didn't even hear Henry's footsteps, and I thought he was still walking. Suddenly I saw a few kids peering out from behind trees. I didn't hear any of them approach, and suddenly there were more. I looked around for a house or something, but I didn't see one. More kids emerged from the trees, and they all had black eyes like Henry. Some of them were dressed like him, in old-style clothes, but others were dressed in more modern outfits. There were so many of them, I think I counted twenty or so, and they all looked different. Black, white, asian, hispanic, the kids were from all different ethnicities, and I remembered thinking this was odd if they were all supposed to be brothers and sisters. They approached me slowly, timidly, like they were inching into a pool full of cold water.

"Hello dear Henry," a woman's voice said.

I turned around and was met with a tall, pale woman in one of those gothic, black, victorian dresses that covered the whole body. She was middle aged with her black hair pulled back in a tight bun. Her hands were clasped over her midsection and she had he back perfectly straight, like the instructor of an etiquette class.

"Hello Mama." Henry responded. "This is my new friend, Cameron."

Her arresting gaze turned to me and I froze. It's like when the principle looks at you, even if you weren't doing anything wrong, you feel like you were.

"Well hello mister Cameron," Henry's Mama said. "My my, you are handsome."

"Thank you, miss," I replied meekly.

"Oh my, are you shy? I'm sorry, I really should introduce myself." She extended her bony hand. "My name is Clarissa, but you may call me Mama."

I shook her hand. "Hello miss Clarissa."

She threw back her head and laughed a deep, regal laugh.

"You were right, Henry dear. He is a curious fellow."

"Are these all your children?"

"Yes they are," she said, gazing proudly at all the little faces.

"How come they all look different?"

Henry's Mama laughed again.

"I've adopted them, my dear Cameron. Do you know what adopting means?"

"That's when you be a mom to a kid without a mom, right?"

She patted me on the head. "Very good! You're quite the smart boy. Most children your age don't know about that yet."

"I read about it."

"Yes, Henry had mentioned that you liked to read. I like to read too. Would you like to see my books?"

Not wanting to be rude, I nodded. She gestured to a wooden cabin that I must've missed. It was the same color as the trees, and they were all very close together.

"Oh you do have a house!"

"Why of course we have a house, silly! I have a library in there too full of books for all my children!"

I had only heard the term "library" used to refer to the big building where you rent books, so to think that Henry's Mama had one of those in that cabin blew my mind. Of course, it wasn't that, but the room was much bigger than it seemed the cabin could contain. Floor to ceiling, it was all books. The shelves were lined with them, and then there were more books laying on top of the rows and several stacks in the corners of the room. Two

lamps lit the cozy little room, which had a goat-skin rug on the floor with a couple beanbag chairs around it. My mouth hung open.

"Wow!" I gasped. "This is amazing! I've never seen this many books! And you have beanbags! I love those!"

"I thought you might. If you'd like to read any, go right ahead!" she gestured through the doorway.

I turned to her. "I'd love to, but I really want to play with Henry and the other kids first."

She patted me on the head again. "Of course dear, whatever you want. I'd love for you to meet my other children."

Okay, I think this will have to do for today. Sorry to leave you guys on a cliffhanger like this, but I don't want to be thinking about this before I go to bed. I don't want another nightmare. I'll write some more tomorrow.

Posted on September 26th, 2019

So this whole thing is starting to get weird. Yes, the content of the story is odd enough, but now I have this uneasy feeling that something more sinister was going on. A guy in the comments said that he was from my hometown said that he had multiple encounters with this 'Mama' person. He could've been making it up just to scare me, but that doesn't seem possible. He described things about her that I haven't written about yet, things she says and her mannerisms...this is so weird. I guess I'm somewhat relieved that I'm not alone in this. I tried reaching out to the guy to talk more about it, but he didn't respond. I'll keep trying.

To top it all off, I ended up having another nightmare last night too, even though I intentionally watched a comedy before going to bed. This time though it wasn't just about Henry, it was about all the kids. I was in a small, dark room with no doors or windows. Little by little, those black-eyed kids from the forest began to appear around me. First, it was just Henry, then it was two more, then four more, then eight more. There got to be so many of them that they suffocated me, pressed me from all sides. The room's temperature raised with all the body heat and I began to sweat and gasp for breath. The oxygen in the room was being used up and it became a vacuum. I passed out while

their black eyes watched me. I woke up then with my sweaty back sticking to my bed sheets. I really need to stop talking about this if I want to get any sleep, so I'm gonna finish the story here, today. Forgive me if this isn't very descriptive. I just need to get through it.

I did end up meeting all of Henry's brothers and sisters that day. Much to my disappointment, they were all just as dull as Henry was. They all moved and talked slowly, like they were half-asleep or something. It was super weird, but at the time I didn't really know any better. I just thought they were boring. Henry's Mama was strangely the most alluring one. Eventually I did break away from Henry and his siblings and returned to the cabin.

"Welcome back, dear," Henry's Mama said, standing from her rocking chair as soon as I entered the cabin. "Did you get along well with the other children?"

"Sort of," I half-lied.

"Oh well. I'm sure they'll get accustomed to you eventually."

"I was wondering if I could read a book now?"

She smiled. "Well of course! Read as much as you like."

I went to that room with the beanbags and found my favorite book, oddly enough, on top of the pile closest to the door: *The Lightning Thief*. I plopped down and began to read. I intended to read up until the part early on where Percy fights the minotaur, but that chair was so comfortable and the light was so soft that I read way more than I thought I would. It wasn't until the part where Percy fought Ares that I realized how late it must be, and I still had to walk all the way back to my house. I got up, set the book back where I found it, and made my way out of the room. I bumped into Henry's Mama, who had been walking to the book room at the same time.

"Sorry," I said.

"It's okay dear! Had enough reading? What would you like to do now?"

"Actually I think I should be heading home."

"Home...?" she asked, her voice trailing off. Her expression became bland, almost trancelike.

"Yes. I'm worried that my parents are worried about me, and it's a long walk back."

She snapped back to her usual self. "Why of course, how could I forget?"

"Thank you for letting me read, miss Clarissa," I said. "I had fun."

"Of course dear, any time at all."

She walked me outside, where it was now dusk. The orange light of the sunset faded into the deep blue beneath he forest canopy. All the kids were outside facing the door of the cabin, as if they were waiting for me to emerge.

"Can Henry walk me back?" I asked his Mama. "I don't remember how I got here."

She pursed her lips. "Oh dear, I'm sorry but I don't want my Henry walking back here alone at night. Henry honey, don't you remember the way to Cameron's house? Do tell him."

"I don't remember," Henry mumbled.

I looked back at Henry's mom, and I thought I saw the faintest smile on her face. I can't be sure though, because very quickly there was a saddened look on her face.

"Oh dear...well I suppose," she started, "no..."

"What?" I asked.

"Well...this is very inappropriate of me to suggest, but you could stay here for the night and make your way back in the morning." She gestured back to the cabin. "I have more than enough beds."

Was there a bedroom in that cabin? I hadn't seen one when I was inside, let alone one big enough for all those kids.

"No thank you, miss Clarissa," I said respectfully. "I think I can make my way back on my own."

"Oh but wouldn't your mother worry about you walking by yourself? It's dangerous in the forest."

"I'll be fine. She'd be more worried if I didn't come back."

As I began to walk away, Henry's Mama followed me, reaching out as if to grab my arm but she refrained. She really looked concerned. I assumed it was for my safety.

"I have video games here too!" she called out. "Henry told me

you liked those!"

I was already gone. Nothing was gonna change my mind to go back, though I thought a great deal about what she had said about them having video games. Henry said he wasn't allowed to play.

Posted September 28th, 2019

Hey, sorry I didn't finish up that last story. I was getting a bit freaked out thinking back to that time and decided to call it a night. I did make it home safely. I found that creek I mentioned earlier and used it as a landmark to make sure I was going the right direction. My parents were worried as to how long I'd been gone though, so I told them the full story. I figured something was up with this woman and her kids. Like maybe they were homeless or something. I wasn't exactly afraid of them at the time, but I figured I should tell an adult. When I did, my parents' reactions terrified me. You know that feeling you get when you go to step up a stair and it's just a little higher than you're used to? It was like that. I thought that whatever was wrong, it was minor and could easily be fixed by my parents, but their response to what I said scared me. They began asking me if the woman touched me, and I said she did, but only messing up my hair. That didn't ease their concerns though, and they ended up calling the police. I couldn't believe it when they showed up. It was like out of the movies I watched. Here I was, an eight-year old, and I'm sitting down with police officers answering questions. They actually swept the woods later that day and told us to stay in the house until they got back. It took them hours, which I passed playing my GameCube, and when they got back, I immediately ran to hear what they found. To my surprise, they found nothing. No woman, no kids, no nothing. Just an abandoned cabin that hadn't seen use in years.

Shit, I can't believe I've never realized how creepy this was. I figured that the police had simply not searched the woods enough. They were pretty big after all. They would've had to comb the whole mountainside to search the *whole* forest. But now that I think back to it, and knowing how thorough police are, things didn't add up. Could I have been seeing things? I didn't think so. I have no documented issues of hallucinations. A lot of people in the comments of these posts have been saying that something

supernatural was going on, and while I don't consider myself a superstitious guy, I'm beginning to run out of logical explanations in my head. Could this woman and her kids have been ghosts? I guess with the urban legends of black-eyed children, they could've been, but the woman didn't have black eyes. Her eyes were normal. I guess she still could've been a ghost. Son of a bitch.

I'm honestly not sure what I should do. Some people have suggested I contact a paranormal investigator, but I feel weird about taking it that far, especially because this is behind me. I'm also uneasy about what people will think of me if I hire somebody like that. I'm afraid people will think I'm crazy.

Yeah so that's my story. Sorry if it didn't have an ending that explains everything, but I still don't know everything. I'm gad I was able to finally talk about this in a place where I'd be listened to, and I hope that you guys enjoyed me telling it. Thank you.

Posted November 25th, 2019

Sorry to bring back this dead forum, but something just happened that's got me really freaked out. I guess I'm hoping that by writing this down it can help me to deal with it.

So I'm back home for Thanksgiving break. This is the first time I've come back since writing about this, and those woods behind my house are looking different than they used to. I don't mean that some of the trees have been cut down, I mean that I'm looking at them in a whole different light. I'm trying to keep that in mind, because it may explain what I saw just now, but I'm not too sure.

I had taken a shower and was all set to break out my old GameCube and relive some childhood memories when I looked out the window of my bedroom and saw something at the edge of the forest. It was only a blurry glimpse of white, but I focused and that white thing I saw was the white face of Henry's mama, standing, hands clasped, at the tree line. Her eyes were fixed on me, like she had been waiting there expecting to see my face at the window. I hope this was my mind playing tricks on me, deep down I do. But I know that isn't the case. I watched her wave to me before turning and walking back into the woods.

I told my parents what I saw. They kind of laughed at first but I insisted that I was serious, so they called the police. Of course,

just like before, the police searched and found nothing. They questioned me about drug use or alcohol. I don't touch that stuff, but part of me thinks my parents and the police don't believe me. I'm home from my first semester of college, of course people think I've been drinking. The police went away and we were left sitting in our living room at around three in the morning. I know what I saw, but on the other hand I felt ashamed for keeping my parents up that late. It's completely useless to tell them because there's never any proof that the woman is out there. Fuck. At least I'm only gonna be here for a week.

Posted November 27th, 2019

I saw her again last night. I looked out my window and there she was, by the edge of the forest. This time she was beckoning to me. I shut the curtains and turned on my GameCube to try and forget, but it wasn't working. I was hearing her voice in my head, or at least I think it was in my head. I don't know. It was so loud. I kept turning the volume up on my TV to drown it out but her voice was always louder. My dad had to come in and tell me to turn down the TV because he and mom were trying to sleep. I obeyed and put headphones on, hoping those would help. Things were better after my dad left, I guess the headphones did their job. I fell asleep with them on and remembered waking up to music.

Posted November 28th, 2019

I can't go to sleep anymore. I see her everywhere. Last night I swear I saw her in the corner of my room across from my bed, but that could've been a nightmare. I'm having trouble distinguishing between my dreams and my daytime thoughts. I don't know which is better though. At night, I see her in the corners. She climbs up my walls and across my ceiling. She sits there above me, watching me in my bed. During the day I see her in the woods outside. I see her in mirrors briefly, like she's watching my reflection too. To top it all off, today was Thanksgiving. I was supposed to be having a nice dinner with my family, but all I could think about was this.

I'm beginning to figure things out though. On a whim recently I looked up missing kids in my town, and just about all of them were in the woods that day I met Henry's mama. I'm guessing she kidnapped them like she tried to do with me. What doesn't

make sense though is that these kids have been missing for years, decades even. Yet not a single one of them looked to be over the age of eleven. It's hard to find news articles for some of these kids, but all the ones I've been able to find have the last confirmed sightings of the kids as being in or near the woods of this town. I printed out as many articles as I could and dropped them in an envelope at the police station. I put my name on it and wrote a letter about my experience and how it all matches up. I wanted to tell them myself, but after twice looking like a fool in front of the cops, I couldn't face them again. Let's just hope that they take it seriously this time. Oh who am I kidding? They won't take it seriously. They'll think I'm just another raving lunatic, like the guy who's always yelling about witches. Yeah this town has no shortage of strangeness to it. I'm gonna do some more research on this town and its history, maybe see what I can find out about the woods themselves. I'll update you all tomorrow.

Posted November 29th, 2019

So I'm writing this one pretty late, but damn I've found out a lot. I've been up for hours clicking through article after article and page after page about this crazy town. I haven't slept yet, though that's probably for the best.

The earliest stuff I found was from colonial times. There were a couple witch-burnings here way back when. You know they would actually do that to you while you were still alive? Sometimes they'd even skin you first. Most of these women didn't even do anything. I guess back in those times they'd accuse you of being a witch if you so much as looked at someone funny. We read that book The Crucible back in high school and I thought it was just a story, but it's crazy how accurate it is. People would gang up on the woman that they didn't like and call her a witch just to get her out of their lives. It's fucked up.

I did however find a couple women who actually did commit some crimes and/or were into some weird stuff. One of the women was a pedophile (which they called 'witch' back then). Another one drowned her children in a river. Most of the others were devil worshipers. Could one of these witches still be haunting the woods? Do witches haunt? I don't know. These happened so

long ago that there aren't any pictures of the women, so I can't compare them to Henry's mama. I really think I'm on to something here. This has to be the answer. I don't know what I should do... maybe tomorrow I'll go down to the church and see a priest about this. Maybe they would know what to do.

Posted November 29th, 2019

Wow that last post was crazy. I don't know what I was going on about with all the talk of witches and stuff. I've slept a little bit on it and now none of it seems to be all that big of a deal. I guess all those late nights in college finally caught up to me. Anyway, I just thought I'd post this even though it's early to let you all know that I'm okay. I'm gonna go for a walk to clear my head. The woods are nice and quiet tonight...maybe I'll go there.

[This forum has been archived]

Dr. Rank's Purpose in a Doll's House

Asad Noman

Reflective Statement

A Doll House, a play written by Henrik Ibsen and published in 1879, has layers of elements suchas the incorporation of ideologies of the Victorian Era. In the play, Ibsen reflects the common view on women during this time period, and thus played a vital role in the uncovering and betterment of the malicious attitude towards women. They were expected to rely on male figures in their lives, to only work if they were widowed or otherwise didn't have a male figure to support them financially, to be subjected to a hateful attitude, and to submit to this attitude towards them for their entire lives. These subjugations were extensively outlined by Silas with cohesive parallels to the play.

I didn't fully understand the extent to which Ibsen actually portrayed the attitude towards women, nor the ramifications of such a text. By analyzing the biography of Ibsen I learned that the controversy surrounding Ibsen's works, not only *A Dollhouse*, but many of his other works led to revolutionary challenges to what otherwise would be barbaric practices such as the subordination of women, incest, and venereal disease. By doing so, Ibsen developed a "more relatable"projection of plays, pushing the boundaries of traditional theatre and sparking the Realism Era. Despite Ibsen's revolutionary social impacts, the build up to society actually accepting the impact was frightful. It was discussed that not only were the men distraught, but the women were shocked at the idea of going against their apparent role. Overall, Ibsen revealed to his audience, our class included, that it is difficult to change the mindset of a society, even though the new ideology may be an improvement. Personally, from the discussions that took place regarding the roles of different

characters, I began to relate with the play and apply it to society's standards today towards change. I now have a new perspective towards equality and the actual weight of it. I thought the play only challenged the view of women in society, but I realize now that it pioneered so much more. It offered an outlet to the general ideologies, sparked an ongoing social revolution, and most importantly evidence that, no matter how daunting, change can happen.

Dr. Rank's Purpose in A Doll's House

Women in the 19th century were burdened with the separate spheres ideology; being solely responsible for the home and subordination made revolutionizing into independent women a struggle for them. Henrick Ibsen highlights this struggle in his work *A Doll House* by portraying a woman, Nora, with the potential for progress, and elaborating on her journey to become a revolutionary woman. In order to build strong meaning behind Nora's development, Ibsen employs a character to embody all of what Nora should model after, Dr. Rank. Ibsen engineers Dr. Rank to have certain aspects which he contrasts with those of Nora's life in an effort to craft a meaningful reason behind Nora's ultimate development. Dr. Rank provides Nora with a genuine relationship, serves as a role model in terms of his approach to societal pressures,and warns her of the "inevitable retribution (46)."

In order to portray the extent to which women were burdened, Ibsen employs Torvald, representative of a controlling male figure. Ibsen furthers the significance of Torvald by constructing Dr. Rank as a foil to him. Almost all aspects of Dr. Rank are opposite to those of Torvald from his demeanor, his life experiences, and most importantly his relationship with Nora. For the most part, they stand out in stark relief to each other. Torvald has a bright future and strives to maintain his public image, whereas Dr. Rank has a minuscule potential for successsince he's plagued by spinal tuberculosis. Their most compelling contrast is in their approach to societal expectations. While Torvald focuses his life on maintaining a facade, centered around control, Dr. Rank brushes off the expectations with his impending demise

in mind. Still, despite his need for order and control, Torvald never evaluates his relationship with those closest to him. As a result, "Helmer with his sensitivity has such a sharp distaste for anything ugly," leaving Nora to learn from Dr. Rank, the one who's comfortable with conflicts and indifferent to societal expectations (45). Their approach to societal expectations is a leading factor in their approach to their respective relationships with Nora.

Because Torvald places a high value on societal expectations, Nora's relationship with Torvald revolves around maintaining a positive conception. Ibsen thereby portrays the Helmer's marriage as disingenuous by underlining Torvalds focus on maintaining a facade. Within their marriage "happiness doesn't matter; all that matters is saving the bits and pieces, the appearance (73)." Throughout the play, Torvald considers Nora to be good only for visual pleasure. Constantly addressing her with pet names, Torvald believes Nora to be "worth looking at," but not worth loving.

Another factor which contributes to Ibsen's portrayal of the Helmer's marriage is the constant reminder of Nora's innocence and child-like persona. Almost every description Ibsen provides of Nora builds the idea that she's never experienced hardships, and struggles with "feminine helplessness (75)." Because her identity relies on being a superficial mother and wife, she doesn't have a sense of self until the end. Neither does she have a sense of responsibility or consequence as she values moral principle over the law.

Ibsen couples these two aspects together and builds the idea that because Nora believes she's only good for her appearance, she submits to Torvald who's only concern is their public image. The Helmer's relationship is then representative of those of the 19th century.

In contrast to Torvald and Nora's relationship, Dr. Rank approaches Nora as an adult. Ibsen contrasts the two relationships by distinguishing between the dialogues within them. Dr. Rank discusses ideas with Nora and confides in her while Ibsen's diction in Torvald and Nora's dialogue is more one-sided and demeaning.

Ibsen provides support to this contrast with Nora'sbackstory. He draws parallels between Nora's housemaids and Dr. Rank as both provide"freedom" from their respective controlling figures (82). Both Nora's father and Torvald's purpose is to "improve Nora" in ways they deem fit (50). Ibsen juxtaposes the current controlling male figure, Torvald, with sanctuary in Dr. Rank. Accumulating their opposite aspects, Ibsen provides Nora with two paths of life: giving Nora room to portray her own feelings and ideas, Dr. Rank provides Nora with a glimpse into a genuine relationship; contrastingly, Torvald provides authority and "directions (57)." Because of the contrast in relations, Nora ends up confiding in Dr. Rank, taking him as a role model, and the audience is able to learn about the extent to which they can actually relate to each other.

In their final scene, in an elaborate reveal, Ibsen connects Nora and Dr. Rank on a deeper level. Nora reveals her plans to remove herself from her situation by means of suicide. She solidifies her intentions after Dr. Rank, unknowingly, relates to her situation by explaining the"inevitable retribution" that innocent children have to endure as a result of their parent's excesses (46). After learning about the "pollution and infection" a parent's dysfunctional relationship can create, Nora covers her ears (46). At this point, Ibsen prompts Nora's true development as Dr. Rank exposes Nora to the most relevant conflict in her life; at the same time, Dr. Rank prompts Nora's moral development. After Dr. Rank confesses his genuine love for her, a literal light floods the room. Ibsen introduces the aspect of light for the first time in the work, immediately after Nora deliberates between who to take as a role model, Dr. Rank or Torvald. Nora makes the moral decision to refrain from asking Dr. Rank for money and comes forth about her opinion on the matter.

Despite her pushing Dr. Rank away, Ibsen continues to model some of Nora's actions after Dr. Rank. The most notable of these actions being her formation of the "miracle (82)." Nora comes to terms with what she wants out of her relationship with Torvald, regardless of societal expectations. Taking Dr. Rank as an example, she decides that what's best for her children is to

avoid the intoxication and inhibit the "inevitable retribution" by implementing aspects from her relationship with Dr. Rank, including a sense of openness (46).

By the end of the novel, Nora has endured a considerable amount of difficulty, from contemplating suicide after being blackmailed, to remaining compliant to her father and then her husband, as well as suffering under societal expectations. At this point, Dr. Rank's work is complete as he's exposed Nora to the ideas of freedom and individuality. Ibsen marks Dr. Rank's departure with a final display of Torvald's incompetence. In response to learning about his bestfriend's death, Torvald criticizes Dr. Rank's "suffering and loneliness" and sees his death "like a dark cloud setting off our sunlit happiness (71)." Ibsen inserts a bit of irony into this statement as in reality, the audience understands at this point that the "sunlit happiness" of Dr. Rank and Nora's relationship is actually being offset by Torvald (71). Nora comes to see Torvald as a "dark cloud" as well (71). After she places her faith in him, like she always has, rather than fulfilling the "miracle" Torvald criticizes Nora's love, calling it a "slippery trick," and continues on to call her "a hypocrite, a liar - worse, worse - a criminal (82, 72)." At this point, Nora sees through Torvald's facade and realizes "that [they] have never sat down seriously together and tried to get to the bottom of anything (76)." Ibsen evolves their dialogue from one-sided and demeaning to more encompassing and revealing. At this instant, Nora, along with the audience sees clear parallels to Dr. Rank's relationship. Nora is longing for a relationship like the one she had with Dr. Rank. A relation where she could be free of judgment and free to speak her opinion. Evidenced by Nora's total abandonment of societal expectations and release of superficial responsibility, Nora takes Dr. Rank's place; however, Dr. Rank doesn't overcome his disease, Nora does.

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On Autumn Leaves

SJ Atkinson

The crackling crunch of dying things
decibel the ear and squelch against matter
hardened from drought – scorched from fire.
They are all around, the dying. Though
It's not a despairing of one life ending,
but a blazing exultation of life lived
simply – basking the sun, drinking in
oxygen, pushing, growing further up and
further in. Such is the autumnal leaf, as
though a length of fabric, cut open to bleed
protection for another, against cold infection.
Even in its dying, foliage collected by
Green younglings and scabrous elders, is
Remade to adorn mantles or crafted into new
Use. There is no sorrow of life ending, although
it will be stamped out in darkness beneath
soil and roots, coming apart by each sinew.
Then, one day a change – a bolt of heat
Transmuting to energy, pushing up from
the gray dust of planets into cold air. Once
more gazing at trees and wild things. Waiting
for the autumn to begin; a long-awaited descent
into undisclosed hope.

Isolation

Dana Sanders

As being alone times two
Only friends you have are the voices in your head,
the roof walls and floor.
What do you do when the floor doesn't like the walls?

The walls hate the door, the door doesn't like you,
the voices in your head are annoying you too.
What do you do?

You sit in silence nice and quiet
Agonizing, Taunting, Haunting, silence.
You try to think but only hear white noise

When did you get a TV installed in your head?
That's right, you're trying to drown out the other noise.
But wait.

There's someone else joining the voices conversation.
You rejoice to hearing a new voice
You have a nice conversation with voices outside the door
Until voices says:

It's sad to see you broken.
Like this shattered and scattered like shards of glass.
I miss you; many people miss you.
What happened to your sanity?

A question that will be simple to answer
If wasn't for all the voices and the...isolation
Alright, Goodnight

Coming from the place

Alyssa DiLascio

The place of crisp, bone-chilling air. She travels through the bright, light beaming on the windshield. Coming from a place with roads full of holes and cracks. The road is white, boring, no yellow lines. She drives shivering, her teeth grind from 13-degrees, air is so cold her throat freezes, begging for water. Trees are naked and the leaves are engraved in the path. Icicles hang on the tree branches, as the white snow sparkles and flurries in the air from the cold wind brushing against the car window. Winter has arrived in the northeast, and she drives for hours, bundled in the north face coat, coming from home

Addie's Bookshelf

Jeannette Jones

After an exhausting day of work, George arrives home his cramped apartment to find classic novels scattered across the living room. His bibliophilic wife, Adelaide, in the center of the literary chaos. What follows is an argument between a couple over books, their past, and the empty bookshelf in the corner.

Addie's Bookshelf

After work, George nearly tripped over Steinbeck when he entered the living room. He took up the book and set it on the coffee table near Adelaide. She reclined on the couch, getting to know Austen. He stepped over Poe, Wilde, and Hemingway on his way to his favorite armchair, squashed up against the wall, but frowned when he saw Twain lounging there. He turned to Adelaide.

"Lovely decorating you've done," he said. "Though most wives put their books on the shelf."

And he nodded to the bookshelf situated up against the back wall, with the shelves that drooped and the painted flowers that peeled. It was large, nearly filling up the space in the cramped apartment. Adelaide turned a page.

"They're happy as they are."

"Oh?" George scratched his head and chuckled.

"Yes." This time she actually broke away from Austen to glance at him before turning back and flipping a page. George went back to his chair and knocked Twain onto the floor. He plopped down with a sigh and shifted around until he was comfortable. Classic authors and poets stared up at him on the floor like expectant

school children. He nudged Frost with his toe and laughed again.

"Well, Addie, I guess that's another thing I didn't know about you. You know, back when we were courting..."

"Hmm."

"You said to me, when we were over at Rae's Diner, 'George, I've just about told you everything about me'."

"I never said that."

"You giggled it actually. You always couldn't go more than two seconds without laughing about something. I used to think you were always making fun of me. I guess you were just happy all the time." He leaned his head back and smiled. "We used to laugh a lot."

Adelaide said nothing. She dutifully flipped another page of Austen. She must be a fascinating woman, that Jane. She had Addie ensnared. George leaned forward and picked up Shakespeare from the pile. He flipped him open, read a bit.

"The course of true love never did run smooth," the man muttered. George snapped him shut, set him down on the armchair.

"Jane..." George instead mused, turning his attention again to Austen. "A lovely name."

"Not really."

"Lovely name for a girl, baby girl..."

"What's that thing you didn't know about me?" Adelaide asked suddenly, breaking the silence. George sat up. She still wasn't looking at him, but she flipped through Austen without really looking at the words.

"Oh. You're kinda messy," George replied.

"I'm not messy."

"Back then the house was pretty much sparkling. You could probably eat off it if you wanted to."

"I'm not messy," Adelaide repeated, more firm. "I mopped the floors yesterday."

George nodded to the bookshelf. "He's looking pretty lonely over there."Adelaide became interested in Austen again. He could see her eyes moving, absorbing the words, reading about prides and sensibilities or whatever. "I told you, George, they're happy where they are."

He laughed, tapped his fingers on the arm of the chair. "What, you can speak to books now, Addie?"

She didn't miss a beat. "Yes."

He wagged a finger at her. "Ah, now see that's another thing I didn't know about you. Guess I'd better start a list now." He started counting on his fingers. "Number one: Addie is kinda messy. Number two: Addie can speak to books. Number three: Addie's happy bein' alone--"

"What?"

"No friends, career, kids. Definitely no kids." He shook his head. "Now I really think those things better go back where they belong. Go ahead and put them back on the shelf."

Adelaide tossed Austen onto the floor. She leaned over and snatched up Bronte. "It's really easy actually," she said.

"What? What is?"

"Speaking to books."George rolled his eyes and snorted. "Yeah?"

"Yeah." Now she closed Bronte and tossed her to the floor. Dickinson was next. "All you have to do is listen to them. I mean, really listen to them when they're talking to you. Don't interrupt. Have something nice to say."

He scratched his head. "That shelf still looks kinda lonely, Addie."

"No, it isn't."

"What, you can speak to shelves now? This is truly astounding."Thanks." She turned one page, then another. "Besides the books told me they didn't want a shelf, have never wanted a shelf. They told me they were just fine on the desk."

"Were they now?" George asked. "I was just trying to do something nice for them. A little gift. I guess they don't appreciate it."

"They do," Adelaide said. "Just not being bullied into something they said they didn't want." Now she laughed and turned another page. "Maybe if you could listen to them, you'd know that, too."

Requiem for my 2000 Dodge Durango

Evan Boyer

I bought you—in a broken state—for a cool eight-hundred bucks from Jared, a high school chum, who was willing to part with you for such a meager sum because, as he so ominously warned, "Something's wrong with the transmission." Indeed, Jared wasn't wrong. The torque converter had detonated during some ill-conceived hill climb attempt, and only after I forked over a thousand more greenbacks to a transmission mechanic (a man who was so leathery and hoarse and greasy, and who smoked so profusely, he seemed to himself be morphing into an automobile) did I get to drive you home. I prodded your squeaky gas pedal on Smathers Street, and you lurched forward with authority, a subtle roar permeating the cabin along with all that wind noise—squat and muscular though you were, you could hardly be considered aerodynamic. Of course, you weren't built to cut coolly through the atmosphere like a balsa wood glider—you were made to rip through it with prejudice, like some demented horror movie villain who needs only to breach a cabin door to achieve his heinous, limb-tearing goals.

What really drew me to you initially was your paint. Dubbed "Flame Red" by the visionary minds at Chrysler, it was still—even after your twenty years sleeping under the stars—incredibly vibrant and forbidding, like the red of the "occupied" sign on the port-a potty that was your last bastion of hope before shitting your pants at a music festival, or maybe the red you observe when you look at your arm after scraping it on a rusty nail and realize you're bleeding—bleeding pretty bad.

You accelerated with uncanny haste for being such a heavy bastard(I never addressed you with feminine pronouns—why would I, when starting you up on a chilly morning produced a

grumble so throaty it could be mistaken for that of an aging, arthritic pro-wrestler as he opens his medicine chest to find he's out of painkillers?) One crisp fall morning when I felt particularly naughty and you particularly spry, I managed to hustle you up to an ass-clenching 115 miles an hour on a desolate, rod straight country road that seemed laid for the express purpose of affording kids some tarmac to succumb to their foolish faculties. When it wasn't propelling me down the road at unlawful speeds, your heart, a rowdy 360 cubic-inch V8 that swigged gas with the verve an alcoholic swigs boxed wine, exhibited that cute small-block tremor at idle, those sporadic little shivers, like a dreaming dog at your feet.

Just as a Bentley would look backasswards if it—god forbid—became dirty, your interior looked and felt strangely inappropriate when it wasn't dirty; you seemed to prefer being stuffed with crumpled clothes and stinking of Marlboro Reds, your cupholders little petri dishes of spilled coffee, crumbs, coins, and a peculiar, regenerating grime whose origin remains unknown. Your third row of seats had at some point become a leather-lined dumpster, the final destination of all those impulsive gas station buys: forlorn packs of peanuts that my mom insisted we stock up on "for the road," gatorade bottles full of sunflower seed shells and saliva, stray skittles and half eaten chocolate bars abandoned with the onset of a toothache. These artifacts of hours spent on the road, while disgusting, imbue an automobile with the kind of unrepentant humanity that can only be found in a high-mileage jalopy.

During our time together, I'd narrowly avoided accidents, made obscene gestures at other motorists from behind your thick glass, raced to the library to print out the first drafts of aborted novels, toted inebriated comrades around tight-lipped as they yelled and sang, tracked the progress of my burgeoning beard in your mirrors, shared moments with not-quite girlfriends on your leather seats, and, more recently, moved into college while my mom drove you slowly, solemnly, home to an empty nest. I have to sell you now, and buy a small, economical, inconspicuous, easy to maintain, homogenous econo-box with an

engine the size of my fist—the absolute antithesis of everything you were. I'm growing up, you see, and growing up entails the grudging relinquishment of things, people, and principles that you assumed, or rather hoped, would last.

Echoes of Laughter

Celeste Baker

I stand amongst lines in the carpet
where my grandparent's furniture once stood,
next to a forgotten clock on the wall.
It ticks as if to say time never stops moving.

In a rush, I see a girl on the floor dumping marbles over her body, laughing.
I hear the Andy Griffith Show buzzing from the TV.
I watch Popa combing through old paper work in his armchair
as Nana and Lane talk on the couch.

Time. Never Stops. Moving.
The ghosts of us disappear as fast as they came.
The air is still.

Green Glass Grass

Ariana Barnes

We think greener equals better
Want to be just like others,
hydrated for the best growth.
You also need some light

Too much is blocking
Your view, maybe if you
Had it all, the blindness
Wouldn't come from
you. Your vibrant colors
Will shine, but what if
Perfection isn't perfect?

Grounded with no roots. Feeling
Like waterless weeds,
Drowned with moisture.
Bare, with the most seeds,
This wasn't your life plan, to
Cut or get cut.

The White Rabbit's Apology

Sophia Russano

I didn't mean to bring you
into my world of madness,
if only my watch kept time,
I would have bounded past you
before you even noticed
I was there.

But late,
I was *late*
late for a very important date
and down you fell.
I wanted to help,
but I was on my own
and so were you.

I knew my way around,
but you were lost,
frightened,
when you couldn't find me.
I just kept on running,
leaving you to drink tea with lunatics,
and now you're late, too.

Oh no no no no no!
The Red Queen almost made off with
my head, but
she settled on yours instead.

Oh dear, oh dear! I'm sorry! Sorry that I gave you

such a scare,
that you wound up in this
this curious nightmare
which you only found in a daydream,
with the help of my tardiness, it seems.

On Living in a Post-Truth World

Asad Noman

Debating whether we live in a post-truth world or not could consume hours of discussion and debate with numerous exceptions to every piece of evidence for each side. For the sake of this paper, it is understood that the society we live in today has strong, widespread evidence of post-truth embraced by different groups of people in their own respective viewpoints. But what does it mean to live in a post-truthworld?

The idea of post-truth stems from a psychological phenomenon known as cognitive dissonance. While post-truth is defined as relating to circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion in comparison to emotional and personal beliefs, cognitive dissonance describes a phenomenon in which a person's cognition and behavior do not align. Being completely contradicted by factual evidence should stir some feelings of dissonance, an uncomfortable cognitive state in which a person feels conflicted between individual and actual reality, and the person should try to balance what they understand as truth and what is being presented to them. Post-truth contradicts this theory entirely in saying that the objective facts are simply less influential in convincing them in comparison to their emotions and personal beliefs.

This strange contradiction raises the question of how one knows something to be true? There are some things to consider within this question such as context, is it asked in a religious context, a mathematical context, a historical context, etc., and ultimately what is the truth? To restate the original question, how does a person know anything at all? There are six different ways of knowing: emotion, intuition, memory, imagination, reason, and faith. Knowing something to be true cannot have an error within the methodology hence why fields such as history and

science are not considered ways of knowing because they are at the mercy of human error.

There is a critical layer on top of these ways of knowing that defines how humans, individually, assess what is true and what is not, or what they do and do not believe in. I know that I was born on August 21st, 2000, but how do I know that? I have a birth certificate declaring so, but the correctness of that birth certificate is in the hands of the medical professional who wrote it down. Today the difference between me being born on August 21st and August 23rd is one single keystroke on a keyboard and if no one challenges it and no one knows any better, then there becomes a difference between understood and actual reality. The defining factor is trust. Depending on which way of knowing holds the most trust of an individual, their reality could be completely different than the person standing right next to them. For instance, if I invested trust in the memory of someone who claims that they remember when I was born more than official documentation or if I trust that the birth certificate is correct, I would have separate understandings of reality. The objective fact, the ink on the paper, says I was born on the 21st, but if I invested my trust into emotion and I feel in my gut that I had to be born on the 13th, the issues with trusting either way of knowing create what we now call a post-truth world.

What are the implications of this now? Firstly, everyone's birthdays could be wrong. But in order to make any impactful conclusion about people that are refuting the facts, it is necessary to consider a topic in which no one truly knows anything: dinosaurs. The only evidence we have of the existence of dinosaurs is fossil evidence. Thus upon further evaluating the nature of everything we know about dinosaurs, there aren't many objective facts we can assume. Animals inherently have fat stores on their body, and no fat, hair, or cartilage becomes fossilized so what we assume about how dinosaurs looked relies heavily on faith in the artists tasked with drawing the first archeology books. If a million years in the future, a human fossil is discovered what conclusions could be drawn? They don't have noses, ears,lips or maybe they had webbed fingers and

long trunks. So from this, in order to make any claims about the appearance of dinosaurs, personal beliefs take credit more than objective facts.

Perhaps a more relevant modern example: movies. When watching a movie, it is necessary to suspend disbelief in the content of the movie no matter how much it goes against objective facts, otherwise, the whole premise of the entertainment industry is ruined. Objectively speaking, superheroes do not exist; however, in order to appreciate the character of the Hulk in Avengers, one must place personal beliefs above objective facts. The audience needs to trust that what they're watching is true within the world in the screen. Legendary singer Frank Sinatra has many songs about heartbreak and regrets that he made while he was married. Objectively speaking the content is not true, but needs to be understood as so in order to appreciate the heartfelt, soulful nature of the songs. These are a few of many examples of areas in which objective facts cannot be placed above personal belief.

Today the post-truth argument is used often in situations where there is obviously a strongly supported side: flat earth, anti-vaccination, etc. But the arguments cannot be dismissed because of one particular historical precedent. There was a time in history when people believed, and the church enforced, that the Earth was the center of the universe. There were a few people, namely Galileo and Copernicus, who refuted the widespread belief and said everything we know about astronomy is incorrect; they were placed under house arrest and dubbed crazy for trying to challenge the authority of the church. However, people came to find out that they were indeed speaking the truth but in the eyes of the people back then, Copernicus was approached as a flat earther.

Ultimately, the difference between actual reality and individual reality is trust. Trust is at the root of people indulging in post-truth mannerisms. Having trust in sources of information, trust in a particular way of knowing, trust in oneself, or just feelings of apathy dictates whether facts have enough truthfulness to be trusted more than personal beliefs. The validity of the

information is directly correlated with how much people trust in it. Assuming this is true, if trust is indeed the root of post-truth, then the opposite, skepticism, must decide whether you indulge in post-truth at all: the degree to which one indulges in post-truth mannerisms depends entirely on their degree of skepticism in approaching extrinsic concepts.

Nuclear Deterrent: A Timeless Message from its Conception

Allison Schwai

Many decades have passed since the rise in nuclear technologies, scientific advancements made possible under the pressure of a second world war, and the same amount of time has passed since the inception of anti-nuclear sentiments. The United States was the first country to create, test, and utilize destructive atomic weapons in a large part due to the Manhattan Project operating out of the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Its first director, Robert J. Oppenheimer, is credited as the "father of the atomic bomb," but he was not immune to fearing his own Frankenstein's monster. Four months after the first waves of testing the atomic bomb and three months after the bombings on Japan, Oppenheimer delivers an address to the American Philosophical Society, intellectuals tasked with "promoting useful knowledge," about the dangers of atomic weapons, the ethics of science, and a proposal of nuclear deterrent ("About the APS"). Oppenheimer advocates that this "most terrible weapon" must be handled universally and that if such technologies are not completely prohibited, they should only work within the realms of promoting peace in the future. To contextual his argument and convince his audience of his side, Oppenheimer alters the perceptions of social reality. In manipulating how his audience interacts, frames, and views the issue of nuclear weapons, Oppenheimer begins to build a shared mindset to recruit participants in the growing anti-nuclear movement.

Oppenheimer establishes the issue of atomic weapons in the present time in terms of kairotic relevance and using appropriate diction. Oppenheimer grounds the movement as presently active and relevant, naming the issue as a "present crisis," and further enforces this framing in repeating terms like

"today," "this morning," "now," "these late days," and "in these shattering times." Significantly, Oppenheimer addresses the nuclear threat's recent emergence and refers to the issue as a "new" one, but only in specific contexts. Towards the beginning of the speech, Oppenheimer states that the "atomic bomb is not a new conception" in terms of scientific discovery, but he later contradicts his words when he describes nuclear weapons as a "new terror," an "unparalleled crisis," and "a vast threat and a new one." In framing the nuclear threat as new, it becomes a more immediate issue. This is also true for the field of nuclear power, a field which Oppenheimer wishes will be used in a world void of war. It is "a new field growing out of a science inspired by the highest ideals of international fraternity," Oppenheimer says. This implicates moral "ideals," once again placing his side on that of the higher moral good which opposes the "evil thing" that is nuclear armament (Oppenheimer). In aligning the anti-nuclear stance within realms of immediacy and morality, Oppenheimer makes it increasingly difficult for his audience not to take his side.

Oppenheimer pushes the immediacy of the issue further in continually broadening his audience. First, Oppenheimer must expand the reach of nuclear technologies in his audience's minds. To do this, he says the nuclear threat was unavoidable within standard realms of scientific discovery even though it simultaneously "altered abruptly and profoundly the nature of the world." These contrasting points work together to appeal to the direct audience, the American Philosophical Society, who values radical knowledge and can make radical discoveries themselves. It defends them from assuming that they were excluded from the great discovery of atomic powers and excuses their lacking awareness of nuclear science. By not undermining them, Oppenheimer gains their sympathies which will ideally lead to their support. While this audience, the APS, is present throughout the speech, the directly stated audience shifts from a national level to an "international fraternity" by the end (Oppenheimer).

In evoking an international audience and potential mediators of change, the issue of nuclear weapons expands. It has been an

international issue from its inception because it was used by the United States during a world war to attack another world power. So, as Oppenheimer articulates the movement as growing in scope, so too does it grow in its moral requests. Oppenheimer asks nations to cooperate as a "fraternity" that shares a "common responsibility" to "avert atomic war" which is both realistic and achievable, so much so that it turns into a "practical thing" and "conventional" solution. This frame elevates the issue to an international scale of ethics and righteous obligations. With this wider lens, the opposition to the anti-nuclear movement is solidified as not one country with nuclear weapons but simply as nuclear weapons in general, weapons of which the united world must fight against.

Next, the established international audience's past perceptions of nuclear weapons shifts in light of selective bits of history. By delivering this history, Oppenheimer repels questions and statements that seek to contradict his intentional and categorical structure of the nuclear issue: nuclear weapons should be disarmed but nuclear technologies should continue to persist in peaceful modes. To nip this concern in the bud, Oppenheimer states at the beginning of his speech that in researching the atomic bomb in Los Alamos, "there was no great new insight into the nature of the physical world," and that the discoveries made were, although surprises, surprises in a familiar scientific field. In framing the discoveries of nuclear technologies in terms of standard scientific practice, Oppenheimer veils the discovery as "inevitab[le] in the end." In establishing this context, he can later augment the destructive powers of nuclear weapons through tension between their creation during wartime and their inevitability to be conceived in times of peace. Nuclear weapons intended for war should have never been invented, says its creator, and when nuclear technologies would have been developed, they would—and should—have been used for merely peaceful means (Oppenheimer). By choosing to frame the Los Alamos discoveries in a scientific frame and omitting their connections to the wartime atrocities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Oppenheimer reflects the Los Alamos mission as one

of mere exploration and not weapon building. In doing so, the argument to keep nuclear technologies in times of peace is not unwittingly opposed.

What is directly and intentionally opposed is Oppenheimer's own government, and this is done to cast the anti-nuclear movement into more than just the scientific realm. Early in his speech, Oppenheimer wants to share the story behind the atomic bomb's creation—in terms of scientific achievement, the feat of nuclear technologies was groundbreaking for a time period decades away from the invention of computers and smart phones—but Oppenheimer intentionally disappoints his listeners in his inability to tell such a story. "That would not be a dull story, but it is not one that I can tell today," he says, "It would be too dangerous to tell that story. That is what the President, on behalf of the people of the United States, has told us." In casting partial blame of the weaponizing of nuclear powers to the President, Oppenheimer labels his cause as one that may oppose institutionalized powers when they make wrong decisions while it also exists as a movement that is fostered out of the creations of institutions; the Los Alamos project was sanctioned by the United States government. Additionally, Oppenheimer effectively shapes the United States government, particularly the President, as a direct opposition to his cause by both subverting his audience's expectations to tell a story and grouping that same audience into his identity through an "us" (Oppenheimer).

The collective identity of "us" bridges the gap between Oppenheimer and his audience and takes on more than one meaning to further broaden this audience. This "us" primarily refers to Oppenheimer, his fellow scientists, and his direct audience of the American Philosophical Society who are intellectuals and scientists in their own fields. For the United States government to deny a collection of the first atomic scientists the right to share their findings in a timely manner reflective of the kairotic moment, the communication of the scientific discourse is denied. Oppenheimer directly states: "without that recognition from his fellow men of value of his

work, in the long term, science will perish." Science will decay just as the ability to tell the story decays. On a cultural level, in describing the history of the Los Alamos studies as a "story," the issue is reframed as an individual prevented from storytelling (Oppenheimer). Thus, the "us" cannot witness the story and misses out on its experience. The inability to tell a story pushes the argument towards grounds of freedom of speech and the larger master-frame of human rights. In tying together these social movements spheres, speech rights and human rights, with the anti-nuclear movement, Oppenheimer makes his issue one that is more relatable to the audiences of the other spheres, with these spheres being more accessible to the common listener.

To effectively convince his broadened audience of his side, a side that opposes the international actions the United States had made mere months before at the end of World War II, Robert Oppenheimer reframes the presence and threat of nuclear weapons to accommodate recent, known, and secret history and the immediate present circumstances. Just as the Los Alamos discoveries were described as a little more than the scientific ordinary, so too does Oppenheimer remind how he has said few facts that are "new to anyone." What side the audience will choose following Oppenheimer's speech and in the face of the anti-nuclear movement is familiar, natural, and clear as it is a choice reflective of human ethics and morality. "[T]here is only one such course," Oppenheimer says, "and that in it lies the hope of all our futures."

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We

Allison Schwai

All sorts of noises come out
of the coffee shop that thrives on main street
no matter what city, what region,
big or small, chain or mom-and-pop,
I hear the same things each time
I enter: one tall black coffee,
the hum of a laptop waking, a collection
of chair legs skidding, vibrating
in the ceiling, the dull snap
of cardboard cups on a dozen tables,
a whispering husband on bluetooth speaker,
the giggling of a sister and brother,
three grannies chatting, the panting
of a service dog and the flicking
fingers scratching his head,
thank you and silence, spoken courtesies,
car horns yelling, tires grit
on pavement in sudden
halts, the army of feet
outside should be shaking
the glass display.
Nobody else hears it.
I am left out of a deaf people.

Depravity

George Stewart

You could say the weekend, was one of substance.
Or perhaps the plural form of it.
Substances,
to be misused,
dare I say,
abused.
Friday through past Easter morn,
I could use resurrection from hangover's scorn.
Or just some amphetamines.
You gotta be kiddin me,
but sure I popped em,
with no one around, who'd stop him?
Pills man.
Thrills man.
Just take another to keep the downfall at bay.
As days begin to blur, and you wonder,
how did it get this way?
Chase the crackle of booming thunder.
it is all so electrifying,
The allure, so terrifying.
We are but bolts of lightning, lighting the sky,
None of us have time,
to question why.

Wild, Wonderful, West Virginia

Victoria McKown

"Almost Heaven West Virginia. . . Country roads take me home to the place I belong."

John Denver (Country Roads)

We are all hillbillies they say.
We have no front teeth.

I have always been
living in the mountains nooks and cranny's
seeing the stars peek their eyes on a Saturday evening
glistening toward the smiling moon.

We are all spitting country folk they say.
We have no cleanliness they say.

I have spent my whole life
enthralled by the autumn leaves
spreading in and out of the hills
their red yellow arms fluttering to the ground.

We are all rednecks they say.
We have married our cousins they say.

After high school, I was
prepared to leave
the olden rocky pieces
of a broken dreamy river.

Everyone's always leavin'
The mountains are always callin'.
We will come a followin'.

Soul Bound

Elisabeth King

The smell of steaming coffee radiated through the air as I forced my eyes to open. I lifted my body up hesitantly, wiping the dried slobber from my mouth and the beige crust out of my eye lashes. It took me sixteen whole minutes to convince my feet that it was time to get out of the bed.

"No decaf this morning?" our cook, Marla questioned as I reached out for the blue-handled pot.

"It's an important day. I'm going to need every ounce of caffeine to wake me up if I am to get through this properly," I replied.

"You'd be surprised, Marla, how much has not changed despite how much should be changed."

It is a common tradition on the continent of Mitica to perform soul binding ceremonies for young men and women of age. The purpose? To create perfectly paired couples for a harmonious civilization. Multiple realms across Mitica have decided to do away with the old custom to modernize with the times, but other realms, such as Ethana, would not dare consider changing its practice. Boys and girls of eighteen years and older attend these ceremonies annually to match their souls with their destined partner. If they are not matched upon their first year, they are required to attend until they are matched, or dead. That's just the way things have always been. On the evening of my fifth soul ceremony, here I was, munching on a handful of pretzels while a handmaid tightened my corset.

"Does my corset look too tight to you?" my friend Malena asked as she tugged at the constraining structure underneath her gown.

"Does it matter? I'm more concerned about the snacks we've

stuffed in our gown pockets," I replied.

"What's there to be concerned about?"

"If we have enough. This will be our fifth year of going through with this stupid ceremony, and if there is one thing I've learned it's that the food is always horrid." I braced myself against the wall as the handmaid pulled tighter, tighter, and too tight on my corset.

Only the wealthy girls would be wearing these, with their extravagant gowns adorned with fine heirloom jewelry. My mother always said it was to distract their future matches from their revolting personalities. The middle classed young men and ladies dressed simply with plain frocks, white shirts, and tidied hair. The lower classes never attended the soul ceremonies. The High Council thought it best to leave them to their own devices instead of flaunting any sort of wealth or privilege.

"I haven't seen your dress yet! I hope it's not that same gaudy forest green color like last year's ceremony." Malena tugged at her corset once more.

"I think the gown turned out quite nicely!" my mother chimed as she entered my bed chamber.

She swiftly made her way to my closet and slid the hanger off the rail, carefully gathering the layered skirts as she brought it out of the darkness. It was a vision of beauty and elegance, yet fierce and mature to represent my growing age. The entire dress was sewn in silver. The bodice consisted of a shear, illusion neckline with scattered, sparkling embellishments. The bottom was a full skirt made entirely out of organza and tulle layering, with a long slit in between one of the layers. It was all tied together at the waist with a silver satin sash.

"It's beautiful, Aurelia! You'll definitely capture most, if not all, of the attention in the room. You may even find your match tonight!" Malena said as she caressed the fabric in her hands.

"You have such a keen fascination for these ceremonies. I would be perfectly happy if they never existed," I said. I knew better than to raise this concern around my traditionalist father.

"You're lucky your father isn't here to witness you speaking like that," my mother said as she began buttoning the back of

the dress.

"So many realms have done away with the ceremony, why can't Ethana be one of them? Can't we simply find a match on our own, like the lower classed citizens?" I sensed my voice pitch straining as I spoke, and my mother biting her lip was a sign that I needed to change the subject. I paused. "Where is father, anyway?"

"Tending to a few matters of unrest in the outskirts of town. Nothing to concern yourself with. He will return in time for the ceremony," she said.

"Is there something being done about it?" I questioned.

"I said that it does not concern you. Your father and members of The High Council have it under control."

"But if there is something dangerous conspiring, should we not be preparing ourselves?"

"Enough, Aurelia. You must learn to listen."

"Would you like me to fetch your soul stone, mam?" one of the maids asked.

I surrendered. "Yes. It's sitting on my vanity."

She opened a small blush colored box on the corner of my vanity and carefully took out the stone. I rubbed the smooth surface between my fingers as she handed it to me, and then promptly shoved it between my sash and dress for safe keeping.

Our families had already procured carriages and departed for the ceremony, Malena and I being behind ten extra minutes. As we arrived together at the town center, I admired the calming flames in the lanterns that framed the entrance. Malena and I joined hands as we gathered our skirts and ascended the stone staircase. I secretly hoped this year would be the end to all this monotony, even though that, in the end, it meant I may be eternally bound to one stranger for the rest of my life.

The ballroom was decorated the same as always, with its golden candle-lit chandeliers and freshly polished ornate tile flooring. One by one, the boys and girls presented themselves before the council to pay their respects accordingly. They were the eyes and ears of the realm, ruling and dictating every aspect of Ethana. It was important to make a good impression when

coming face-to-face with its members.

"Malena Williamson and Aurelia Langstead, what a pleasure it is to see your return," Head Councilman Neilson bid to us.

We curtsied to the seven other members of the council and greeted them politely. It was all I could do to paste a smile on my lips. After the tedious formalities, we mingled with our families and danced joyfully with our friends. This was the only portion of the night where I didn't mind participating. The lights began to dim as the clock crept closer to ten in the evening. The laughter ceased, the music faded, and the room fell eerily silent. Head Councilman Neilson came forward on the stage and asked that all single men and women gather in the middle of the room. Malena and I hugged briefly and wished each other luck. The ladies formed a line on the left side of the room and the men formed a line on the right. We each took out our soul stones and placed them in the palms of our hands.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is with great honor and pleasure that I welcome you all to the two hundred and twenty-sixth soul binding ceremony here in our great nation of Ethana. As our clock nears the sixth strike of ten, I want to wish you all luck and happiness as you find your matching soul. If your stone does not glow as we meet the sixth strike, please quickly step out of your line and make your way to the back of the ballroom," he instructed.

One strike. Two strikes. Three strikes. Make eye contact with Malena. Four strikes. Take a deep breath. Five strikes. Six strikes. I don't know why I was nervous. What was I expecting? My stone began to glow. My eyes reflected the pale lavender shade before me. I felt my stomach constrain, and this time, it wasn't from my corset. I glanced at Malena whose dull stone had transformed into a bright blue color. She was practically jumping in place. The room rustled as half of the group stepped out of line and made their way to the back, some moving slowly while containing their muffled cries. Those of us remaining adjusted our line formation and waited.

"Congratulations to all! In exactly two minutes and thirty seconds your stone will gradually darken into a specific shade

of color. Only then will you be allowed to move about the room freely to find your matching soul," he continued.

As each second ticked by, I scanned the room to observe other reactions. My parents both smiled and encased their hands in one another's, while Malena's parents both gave a thumbs up for best wishes. Some of the girls had stone-cold faces, while others could barely contain their excitement during this time delay. With thirty seconds remaining, the colored stones began to deepen their hue. All different shades and types of colors shot across the room, forming a prism-like effect on the ceiling, except for mine. Was this supposed to happen? It was still lavender. A council member rang a single handbell to announce the wait's end. Many girls rushed across the room to claim their matches, while Malena and I struggled to see through the blinding crowds of color and movement.

"Do you see yours?" I shouted to her.

"No! Do you?"

The lighting in the room began to increase as those who matched had spread across the room to celebrate their pairing, but the darkness could not be suppressed for long. The chandelier was quickly snuffed out by a swift breeze that entered through the double doors of the ballroom. The people of Ethana quickly turned around to see what had interrupted their sacred ceremony. A cluster of men dressed in all black had forced their way into the space. They were the kind of men that had mounds of dirt under their fingernails and no regard for their foul stench. Some guests in the room remained composed, while others struggled to keep themselves from screaming in terror.

As the men marched to face the council, I made eye contact with one of them. He couldn't have been more than a year older than me. His hair was ebony with a slight tousled wave in the front. His scruffy facial hair was just as menacing, but what truly caught me off guard were his eyes. They were a striking shade of purple with an icy layer of white. They pierced through the boundaries of my mind, and I felt butterflies in my stomach. I pulled Malena next to me as we moved away from the center. I had never felt so vulnerable in all my life.

An older man, presumably their leader, stepped forward on behalf of his group and addressed the council. "Head Councilman Neilson."

"Declan O'Leary. It is unfortunate that you have chosen to meet under these circumstances. Why have you and your men disrupted this important evening?"

"Since you sent messengers this morning to explain why you would not meet with us, we thought it more beneficial to come to *you*," the man spoke. "Your people among the outskirts starve, yet you insist on ignoring us. Your people live in unsanitary, fatal conditions, yet you continue to pretend as if they do not exist."

"I'm sure these issues could be discussed at a more appropriate time. For now, I must ask you and your men to leave." Head Councilman Neilson folded his hands and waited for a response.

"We have waited decades for discussion and unfulfilled promises, Neilson. It is time that the oppressive and tyrannous reign of The High Council come to an end," the O'Leary man said.

Without any regard for the lives of their people, the members of the council began to flee, Neilson pushing them all aside to save his own skin. I spotted my father running after them. The ceremony guests cowered in fear and attempted to escape. Only a few stayed behind to fight back against the intruders. Tables were overturned in the midst of the chaos, candles were flung across the floor, the room was slowly being consumed in flames as a result. Realizing we had been separated, I searched the room for Malena's strawberry blonde hair, but smoke and dust consumed my line of vision.

"Malena!" I yelled through the crowd. I was reduced to my knees as two men engaged in a fist fight above me. I pulled myself along the floor in pure desperation.

"Aurelia!" she yelled as she came out of a cloud of ash. Her dress was tattered and her hair scorched as she fell into my arms. "We need to get out of here!" I looked around for any route of freedom, but there were none visible. We crawled further, tripping over a hefty piece of wood that had found its way under my path. I patted away the lone sparks and decided to use it as defense.

"Can you walk?" I asked her. She painfully stumbled to her feet and clutched at her leg. "I'll take that as a no." I stood up, fighting the burning sensation in my eyes as I draped Malena's arm over my shoulders. We waddled to the other side of the room and I sat her down in a corner where she was less likely to be bothered. Surely we must have been near some type of exit. The young man with purple eyes appeared out of the smoke to approach us.

"Come with me, both of you." He reached out a hand.

"We're not going anywhere with you!" I shouted. I took the rod in my hand and attempted to whack him with it, only for him to latch on with both hands and stop me.

"Oh so you would prefer to stay here where you could get trampled to death?" he said. He seized my arm while another man revealed himself and took hold of Malena. I thought about fighting back, but somehow came to the rationality that I had no chance in the midst of the situation. Malena and I needed to be away from this place for any possibility of survival, so we allowed these strange men to blindly lead us away from the pandemonium. I had never realized how much a single breath was worth until I was plunged into the clean air of the night. We took a few moments in the front courtyard to inhale our surroundings and decompress. When our coughing and heaving began to fade, he looked at me intensely. So I did the only thing I knew to do: I slapped him.

"What was that for!?" He yelped.

"How dare you!" I shouted. "Look at us!" Malena was sitting in the grass picking ashes out of her scorched locks. My dress was ripped and charred in multiple places while my hair sat lopsided on my head.

"Look, a simple thank you would suffice," he said.

"You honestly believe that you deserve a thank you after the chaos that has just ensued? You do realize that your little "group" just set part of a building on fire, right? Or are you just that dense?"

"Listen...whatever your name is."

"Aurelia. My name is Aurelia."

"Fine, Aurelia. I could have let you and your friend over there perish in the fire, but I decided to be nice and help you, so just say thank you and we will be on our way," he replied.

I turned to Malena. "Nope, I was right. He really is just that dense." I muddled through the grass and sat down beside her to examine her injuries.

"Cassian, we best be on our way," my "rescuer" called to his accomplice. Cassian was a strong man, thin but muscular. He hesitated as he glanced at Malena sitting on the ground with tears streaming down her cheeks. He stroked his blonde hair with an ash-ridden hand. I dare say in that moment she melted part of his heart.

"Zavian, you go and join the others. I'm sure your father will need your help subduing The High Council."

Zavian. Somehow that name seemed fitting for his sense of mystery.

"Is that one badly injured?"

"Her name is Malena," I interjected.

"Yes. She needs a doctor immediately or I'm afraid she may have permanent damage to her leg," Cassian replied.

"How far do you live from here?" Zavian asked me.

"One mile east. We arrived here in carriages," I replied.

Upon hearing this, Cassian departed and then returned with two horses. He lifted her off the ground gently and placed her on the back of the horse. Without so much as another thought Zavian hoisted me up and secured me in front of him.

"You're going to have to drive. I don't know these parts," he said. The horses trotted down the gravel street as I led us quietly back to my home. I looked at the skirts of my dress flowing off the side of the horse like a dirty waterfall of tulle. Zavian held on to me tightly, as if he was afraid to let me out of his grasp for fear that I might take off without him. This was not how our night was supposed to end. We never even found our matches, and now there was the possibility that we may never have known. Malena groaned in pain every so often as Cassian attempted to keep her calm and quiet. As we came to the street, the house was simply a dark figure without the lamps ignited, a signal that

neither of my parents had returned.

"Nina, fetch a doctor if there is one available. Malena is injured," I said to one of the maids as she rushed to the front door with an oil lamp. Her body tensed up and she stepped back as Zavian and Cassian entered. "Go, now," I instructed again.

I directed Cassian to a guest room where Malena could be placed until the doctor arrived. I rushed to her side with a warmed rag and a canteen filled with water. She drank vehemently. Marla crept into the room and stood just inside the doorway with her hand pressed to her mouth.

"The whole town heard and saw what happened this evening. There are many missing and many have boarded up their homes for safety. Have you seen your parents?" she asked.

"Father chased after The High Council members once they began to escape. I never saw my mother after the flames started," I said quietly.

"We must hope for their safety, then. Things will be unstable until some sort of order is restored. I'm making some coffee and tea in the kitchen if anyone wants any," she said.

Just then, Nina appeared with the doctor behind her. "I'm sorry for the delay, but many have needed assistance this evening. It was the quickest we could get here," she said.

I relieved myself once the doctor had taken over of Malena's care. I opened the door to my bedroom and debated whether I should change clothes. I decided against it. Somehow, I felt that I would be more comfortable in my torn dress than fine silk. I made my way to the living room to sit by the fire. I craved to be completely enclosed in warmth, so instead of a chair, I sat on the floor with my arms wrapped around my knees. Zavian's boots clomped down the hallway as he joined me in the stillness of this moment. He had two mugs in his hand, one filled with coffee and the other with tea.

"The cook lady said you liked coffee, so I thought I'd bring you some," he said. He placed the mug on the floor next to me.

"I feel like I have so many questions to ask you, yet if I choose to ask, I don't know how I could bring myself to fully process your answers," I said without changing my fixation on the tangerine

flames of the fire. He plopped down next to me and leaned his back against the ottoman behind him.

"My name is Zavian O'Leary," he said between sips of tea, "son of Lila and Declan O'Leary. I'm twenty-three years of age and I was raised on the western outskirts of Ethana. Our people are poor, starved, and many die each day. It was time something be done about it," he said.

"I didn't ask any questions," I said.

"And?"

"And I was right. I can't process."

"I'm not asking you to fully process what I'm saying. I'm just offering a simple explanation for what happened tonight. Do with it what you will."

"I knew there was unrest and I knew there were issues with The High Council. I have a bone to pick with them myself. I just didn't realize people were out there dying," I said.

"We grew up in two different worlds with very different upbringings. If the High Council had taken care of Ethana's people properly, there would not have been nearly as much violence and bloodshed. We could not stand to the side and surrender ourselves to poverty and death." He did not raise his voice to me, but he was stern. He was passionate. His eyes were sparkling in the glaze of the fire.

I yanked my soul stone out from my sash and rubbed it between my fingers. The light highlighted every nick and crevice of the stone, which still possessed a small bit of lavender. While I did not know what it was like to watch a loved one starve to death or succumb to an illness, this little piece of rock was my symbol of oppression. I spent a portion of my life abiding by their rules and expectations. Perhaps a soul mate didn't even exist. What else had I let myself believe?

"Did you find your match tonight?" he muttered.

"My stone was glowing, but I never found my match. For some reason the color never shifted from lavender."

"Only those who live in the central portions of Ethana are allowed to attend soul binding ceremonies. Those of us on the outskirts of the city have no such luxury.

This is the first time I've seen one of these in person," he said. Zavian reached over and took the stone from my hand, holding it next to the fire to examine it more closely.

"How do you find your matches then?" I asked.

"We find them when we find them, and of our own accord. We get to make that choice."

"But how do you know if you're making the right choice?"

"You just know. It's a feeling."

"That definitely sounds like a luxury to me," I said. As he admired its characteristics, I noticed something strange occurring.

It was glowing. I sat up on my knees and scooted closer to him. It was only then that I saw it. Purple, not lavender, but pure rich purple, almost like a plum. The stone's true hue had revealed itself, and I was in awe of its beauty. The dazzling glow reflected the similar shade in Zavian's eyes as he marveled at the piece.

"I thought you said it was only a shade of lavender?" he asked as he placed it back in my palm. For twelve hours (ten to ten) the stone would glow only in the presence of its match. It was going on four in the morning, still six hours before the stone had any chance of losing its luster. I was amazed at the brightness of color that radiated from the small piece. Perhaps, in the ceremony space, it had indeed detected Zavian's presence, but he was not yet in proximity enough to activate its full potential. Zavian did not seem to realize the significance of this moment. If the tradition of the soul stone turned out to indeed be true, then my match was sitting across from me, and he didn't even know it.

"I should really head back and join my father. I need to see what damage has been done and if any agreements have been reached," he said as he got up and placed his tea on a small glass table.

"I should probably go check on Malena, as well," I said.

I dropped off the mugs in the kitchen and made my way upstairs. Cassian sat outside of Malena's door with his head propped up in his hands. He look exhausted and disparaging.

"Cassian. I think it's time now that we leave these ladies be and return to the group," Zavian said quietly. Cassian did not speak a word. Instead, he reached in his pocket and took out

Malena's soul stone. Dark royal had taken the place of the once bright blue shade.

"Go and join your father, Zavian. He needs you. My place is here."

"You...you know what that glowing means?" I asked him surprised.

"We may not have soul ceremonies where we're from, but we know the ins and outs of 'em. I knew Malena was my match the moment I looked at her. I didn't need a stone to tell me that," he said.

As I turned to look at Zavian, the doctor came out of Malena's room. "I have sedated her and done some repair on her leg. She was severely burned. I dressed and wrapped it for the time being. The dressing will need to be changed twice a day with the ointments I've left for you. For now, she needs her rest. The sedation will wear off in time," he explained.

"Thank you, Doctor Williams. I sent the maids to sleep some time ago. Allow me to show you out," I said.

I used this time to give the boys a chance to talk and discuss. Talk about what, I don't know, but I felt like they needed time for the two of them. When I returned, Cassian was standing and Zavian was leaning against the wall next to Malena's room.

"If you don't mind, Aurelia. I'd like to sit with Malena for a while. I know she'll be sleeping for some time, but I'd hate for her to wake up alone," Cassian said.

"Of course. Just call for one of the maids if you need anything." He disappeared into the dark room and shut the door behind him. Zavian and I were left alone amidst the quiet.

"That's why you helped us get out, you knew this whole time that you were my match yet you decided to say nothing," I said.

"I didn't want to freak you out. Would you have believed me if I had told you right off the bat?"

"Probably not, but now the glowing soul stone makes a lot of sense." He pushed a matted piece of auburn hair away from my face. "Let me come with you."

"Come with me? Why?" he asked.

"Because if I don't I'm afraid you won't come back," I said.

He kissed my cheek lightly. The butterflies were back. "I'll come back, but you need to stay here where you'll be safe."

"If this, whatever this is between us, is going to be a thing, then you need to get used to me not listening to you." I gathered up my crinkled skirts and went back downstairs. "Are you coming?"

We mounted a horse and galloped back to the town center where there was ash still flying through the air. The fire had been contained and extinguished, but the smoke continued to be prevalent. The entire building had not been burned, but the exterior still showed signs up scorching. There was complete silence. Where was everyone? We slid off of the horse and tied it to a nearby fence. I thought I would be more scared as we approached the entrance, but I looked at Zavian and realized that I wasn't.

"Father?" I called out among the rubble of the ballroom. No answer. "Any ideas?"

"Let's check some of the back rooms," he suggested. We made our way through several hallways before discovering a door with a glimmer of light shining through the cracks. Zavian put himself in front of me and quietly stepped towards the room, placing his ear up against it to detect any sound. Men's voices echoed as he pushed open the door. A rectangular table stood in the middle of the room with my father on one end and Zavian's on the other. Men and women of the outskirts stood behind Mr. O'Leary, while my father's friends of the middle and high classes rallied next to him.

"Father?" he said.

"Zavian! Thank god you're safe. We will discuss your disappearance later, but for now, you must join and listen. The High Council has been subdued, for now. We are discussing what must be done to bring prosperity to all parts of Ethana." He motioned for Zavian to take his place by his side.

As Zavian moved slightly to the left I became visible. "Aurelia? Just what do you think you're doing here?"

"Glad to know you were worried for my safety, as well, father," I said.

"Wait, where is Cassian?" Mr. O'Leary asked.

"With his match, Malena Williamson, who was injured in the chaos this evening," Zavian explained.

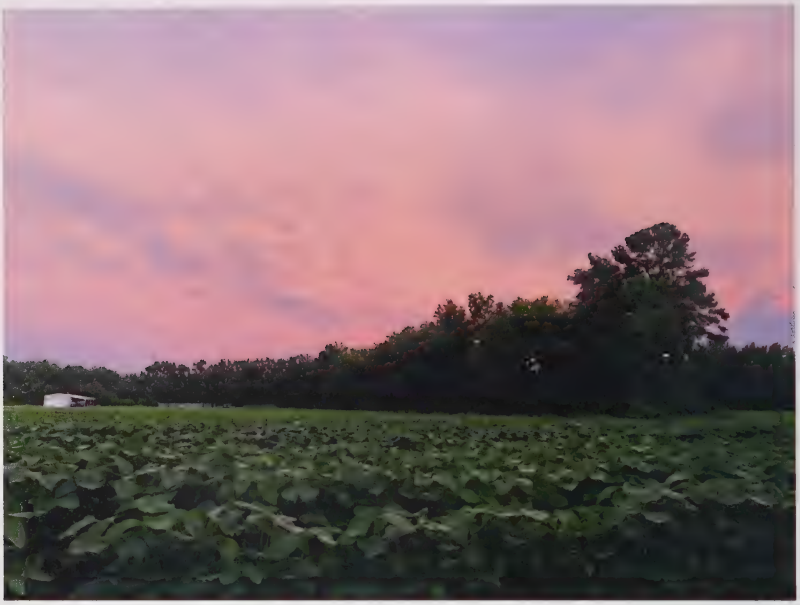
"His match?" multiple voices in the room spoke.

"Yes, and it seems that I have come across my own," he said as he grabbed my hand and gave it a slight squeeze. As if last night hadn't been confusing enough, this perplexed the entire room. I pulled out my glowing soul stone for proof.

"The High Council has mistreated many families in this room, and I think it's time we work together to make amends for those who have been lost," I said. My father was practically frozen in place with no words to utter. Zavian and I represented both halves of Ethana coming together as one. Neither side could argue against that.

"Don't you think it's time we have open minds?" I reached out for my father's hand as Zavian reached out for his father's. They each hesitated before making the decision to reach out to us. They were interconnected through us. Perhaps this was not quite enough to fix the problem, but it was the start of compromise.

[3]
Sydney Schwai



Field of Dreams
Stasha Waterfield

Angler Sub
Zack Lapos

Fishing Village
Zack Lapos

Reconfigured Tetrahedra I
Jordan Kramer

The Orange Blue Ridge Parkway
Oli Porter

Expectations
Nia Murat

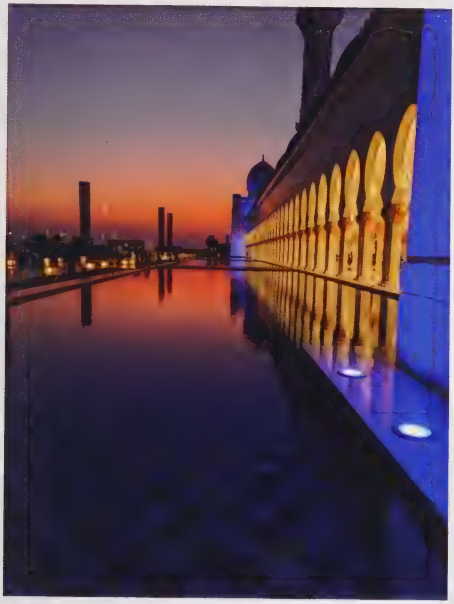
Suspenders
Josc Fink

Happily Ever After
Elisabeth King

Trapped
Nia Murat

The Piano
Fatima Lewis

Gentrification
Thelathia Singleton



Sunset at Abu Dhabi Grand Mosque
Chioma Ngene

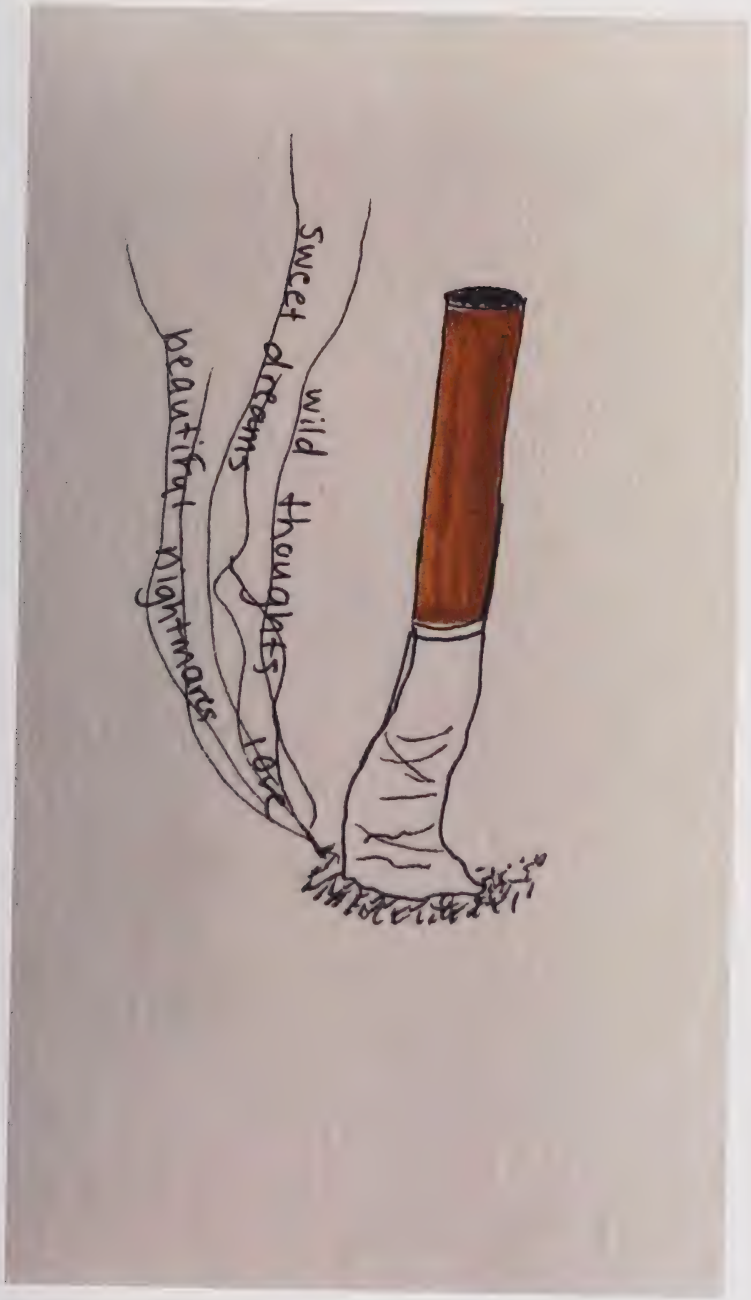
Spirit Bison (Mural Concept)
Zack Lapos

Queen
Thelathia Singleton

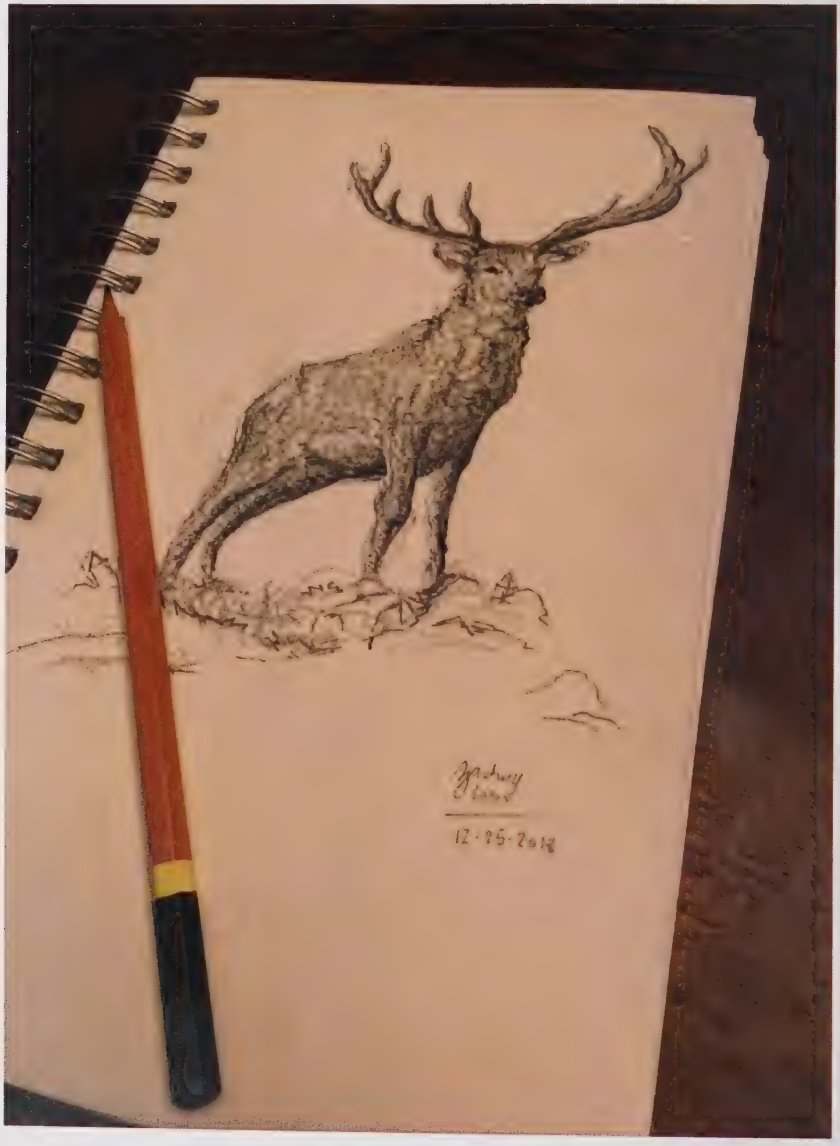
Royalty
Thelathia Singleton

Rage
Nia Murat

Futurist Poster (Living on Saturn's Moon: Titan)
Zack Lapos



Smoke
Izzy Harvey

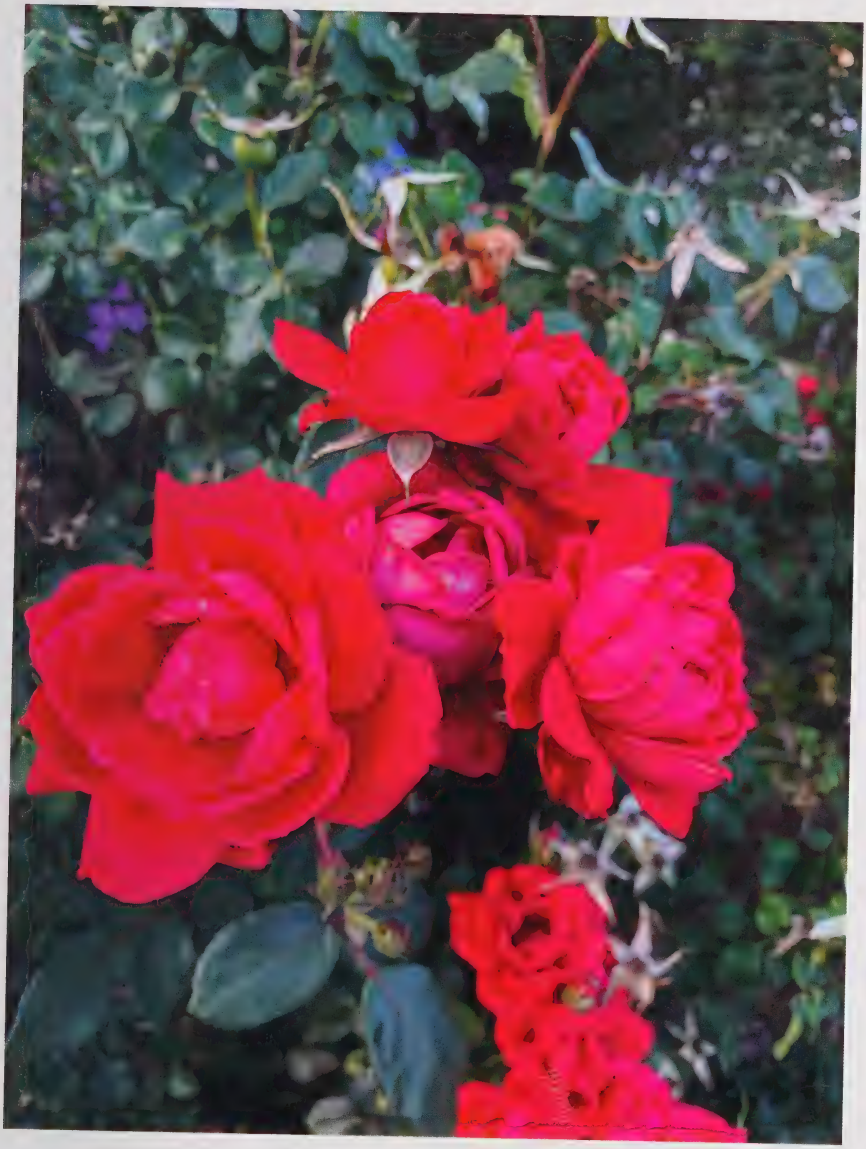


Stag on the Hill
Zack Lapos

Little Flame
Mabry Busby

Firebending
Oli Porter

Reflections
Stasha Waterfield



Bouquet at the Banquet
Sophia Russano

Frying Pan Tower
Oli Porter

Hornets Nest Corridor
Fatima Lewis

Total Wisteria
Stasha Waterfield

A Real Cliff Hanger
Stasha Waterfield

"...it didn't matter how long you'd been gone, or why, or where you've been...So long as you came back, in the end, it was as if you'd never left."

Apple Season
Lara Boyle

Instagram: @signet_queens

Front Cover: **Spirit Bison (Mural Concept)**
Zack Lapos

Back Cover: **Sunset at Abu Dhabi Grand Mosque**
Chioma Ngene